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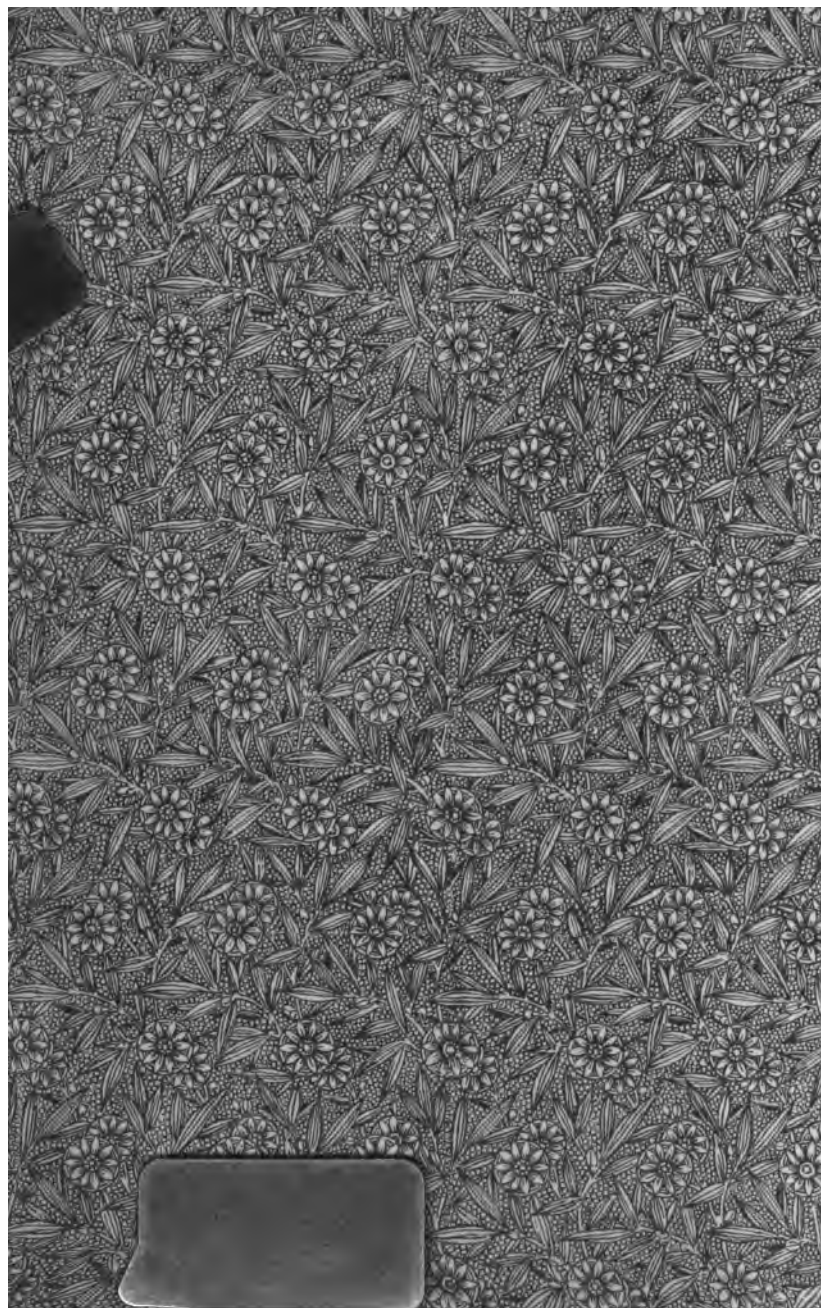
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# MOLLIE DARLING.

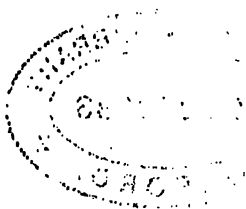
by  
LADY CONSTANCE HOWARD.







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# MOLLIE DARLING.

A Novel.

BY

LADY CONSTANCE HOWARD,

AUTHOR OF 'SWEETHEART AND WIFE,' ETC., ETC.

'I must leave you, Mollie darling,  
Tho' the parting gives me pain ;  
When the stars shine, Mollie darling,  
I will meet you here again.

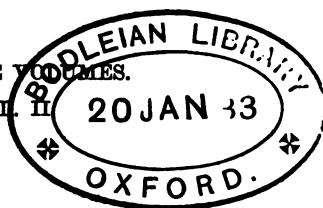
Oh ! good-night, Mollie, good-bye, loved one,  
Happy may you ever be.  
When you're dreaming, Mollie darling,  
Don't forget to dream of me.

Mollie, fairest, sweetest, dearest,  
Look up, darling, tell me this—  
Do you love me, Mollie darling?  
Let your answer be a kiss.'

W. S. HAYES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II



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# MOLLIE DARLING.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STEPMEAD ABBEY.

'Such fate ere long will thee betide,  
When thou hast handled been awhile,  
Like faded flowers be thrown aside.'

HERRICK.

It is just two years and three months since the birth of Mollie's boy. Once again it is August ; the golden fields are ' ripe unto harvest ;' over all the land is spread a glittering cloak of grain, jewelled here and there with scarlet poppies, deep blue corn-flowers, emerald green feathery grass, and star-like ' Margu rite des Champs ;' while

many a brilliant ladybird, in its jacket of bright scarlet with black velvet spots, quantities of beetles of a brilliant blue-green, and armies of soft grey field-mice, find a temporary home among the abundance of the corn and barley. The earth is indeed fair to look upon, marred only by the evil deeds and passions of those created in God's own image—that image which their own follies have defaced so sadly.

The old Abbey of Stepmead looks especially lovely as one evening, about the middle of August, Mollie and Fitzroy drive up the long avenue of oaks which leads to the house. It is the close of the day; a soft shower has fallen shortly before, and left the thirsty earth refreshed and gladdened by its helpful influence; there is a smell of damp which would not be agreeable were it not that it is more than counterbalanced by the scent of the thou-

sands of blossoms which in gratitude to the rain emit even more than their usual fragrance.

The old house is bathed in a flood of light from the setting sun ; the ivy with which the walls are covered is touched by it on every leaf and twig, and the old latticed windows are aglow with it, as if from the glow and warmth of many fires. Over all is the blue sky, flooded as the sun sinks slowly to rest with wave after wave of intense colour, and on everything is shed 'God's own peace.' An evening to do one good, when the mere fact of living is enough, when, in the beautiful words of the record of the world's creation, we could say, 'Behold, it was very good.'

Such thoughts as these filled Mollie's mind as she sat by her husband in their host's comfortable carriage, and proceeded on their way to Stepmead. The old Abbey

belonged to a friend of her husband's, Lord D'Eynecourt, a bachelor, who was endowed, happily for him, with great wealth, and who was never so happy as in seeing the grand old halls of his ancestral home, which had descended to him in an unbroken line since 1623, filled to overflowing with most welcome guests.

On this particular occasion he had elected to give a ball, and his guests were to stay on over the 1st of September, a day which, with the number of first-rate shots who had either arrived or were expected, would strike terror and shot into the breasts of the dismayed, surely doomed partridges.

On the time-worn stone steps stands Lord D'Eynecourt, ready to welcome his expected guests. A lordly peacock struts about close to him ; stone vases flank the sides of the steps at equal distances all the

way down, filled with masses of scarlet geranium and lobelia.

Lord D'Eynecourt is a man of fifty, with a particularly kind, cheery face.

'Here they are,' he exclaims, as after a steady gaze down the line, with his eyes shaded by his hand, he sees the carriage slowly approaching.

'Welcome to Stepmead!' he exclaims, as the carriage stops at the foot of the steps, and he helps Mollie to get out.

After a few words of greeting Lord D'Eynecourt turns to Mollie.

'It is almost dinner-time,' he says ; 'will you come and have a cup of tea in the library before you go to dress?'

'I should like it very much indeed,' answers Mollie.

Lord D'Eynecourt leads the way along stone passages, and into a large hall paved with stone, with rugs made of bear and

tiger skins thrown carelessly about, huge oak tables, and spears, guns, shields, helmets, steel gauntlets, etc., hung upon the walls.

To the left of the hall, concealed by a heavy curtain of genuine tapestry, is a winding stone staircase. Lord D'Eynecourt lifts the curtain for Mollie and Sir Fitzroy to pass, and precedes them up the steps, and along a long passage carpeted with a carpet so thick and soft that no sound is audible as their feet touch its surface. Rare old family pictures are let into panels of oak on the walls; cabinets of ebony, inlaid with ivory or buhl, and 'pietra dura' line the walls on both sides, and on them are arranged magnificent specimens of nearly every known china and pottery. The ceiling is of Wedgwood; and even at that height the cameos are distinct as if cut with a pen-knife, and over each of the

---

many windows is a painting by Angelica Kauffmann that is quite beautiful.

‘What a lovely place!’ sighs Mollie.

‘Yes, it is pretty,’ answers Lord D’Eyne-court. ‘I am very fond of it, and I hope you will enjoy your visit.’

‘Indeed, I am sure I shall!’ responds Mollie. ‘Who could help doing so with this beautiful place, and all your kindness? Oh, what a lovely voice!’ she continues.

And as she speaks the sound of a song comes from the library to greet them with its perfection and sweetness.





## CHAPTER II.

### MOLLIE DARLING.

‘Nought under heaven so strongly doth allure  
The sense of man, and all his mind possess,  
As beauty’s lovely bait, that doth procure  
Great warriors oft their vigour to repress ;  
And mighty hands forget their manliness,  
Drawn with the power of a heart-robbing eye,  
And wrapt in fetters of a golden tress.’

SPENSER.

WHAT was the song ? and who was the singer ? That he, for it was a man’s voice, possessed a voice and talent that had been well and carefully trained, anyone with the smallest knowledge of music could hear. The singer sang on, unconscious that he had an audience, and an admiring one. This is what he sang :

'Won't you tell me, Mollie darling,  
That you love none else but me ?  
For I love you, Mollie darling,  
You are all the world to me ;  
Oh ! tell me, darling, that you love me,  
Put your little hand in mine ;  
Take my heart, sweet Mollie darling,  
Say that you will give me thine.

CHORUS.

' Mollie, fairest, sweetest, dearest,  
Look up, darling, tell me this ;  
Do you love me, Mollie darling ?  
Let your answer be a kiss.

' Stars are smiling, Mollie darling,  
Thro' the mystic veil of night ;  
They seem laughing, Mollie darling,  
While fair Luna hides her light ;  
Oh ! no one listens but the flowers,  
While they hang their heads in shame ;  
They are modest, Mollie darling,  
When they hear me call your name.  
Mollie, fairest,' etc

' I must leave you, Mollie darling,  
Tho' the parting gives me pain ;  
When the stars shine, Mollie darling,  
I will meet you here again ;  
Oh ! good-night, Mollie, good-bye, loved one,  
Happy may you ever be !  
When you're dreaming, Mollie darling,  
Don't forget to dream of me.  
Mollie, fairest,' etc.

‘Oh, you disreputable Mollie!’ whispers Sir Fitzroy, pinching his wife’s soft arm, as she stands by his side, getting pinker and pinker as the blood mounts to her distressed face at each passionate pleading note of the impassioned singer’s; ‘why didn’t you break to me gently that you possessed a lover with a glorious voice, and tell me that at the right moment a serenade would be sung for our benefit?’

‘How can you say such dreadful things, Fitzroy?’ answers poor Mollie, now more distressed than ever. ‘I never heard the song before in my life, and I haven’t the least idea who the singer is; for, as you know perfectly well, I haven’t a notion who is staying here. Anyway,’ she continues, ‘I don’t like him, whoever he may be, for singing that song, lovely as it is; and I don’t believe my ears will ever be cool again.’

By this time they have advanced into the room.

‘Let me introduce you to Lord Mark Champion,’ says Lord D’Eynecourt, ‘Lady L’Estrange, Lord Mark Champion.’

Mollie looks up shyly, feeling painfully conscious of her burning cheeks, and sees the officer who picked up the relics of her fan the day she was presented. She had often thought of him, and wondered who he was, but curiously enough she had never seen him again.

And Lord Mark?—once again he found himself face to face with the woman who had made such a deep and lasting impression upon him.

‘I’m very glad, Lady L’Estrange,’ he said, in his pleasant rich voice, ‘at last to have the pleasure of really making your acquaintance. That day at the Drawing-room could not be called an introduction.’

‘Hardly,’ laughed Mollie, ‘seeing that we did not know each other’s names.’

‘I knew yours,’ said Lord Mark; ‘I had the advantage of you there. I knew all about you; your brother-in-law, Treherne, is an old friend of mine.’

‘Is he?’ answered Mollie. ‘I am very fond of him, though, living as we do in the country, we see but little of him and Doris. Fitzroy,’ she continues, to her husband, ‘let me introduce you to Lord Mark Champion.’

The two men shake hands cordially.

‘My wife was much flattered by your song,’ observes Sir Fitzroy, entirely disregarding poor Mollie’s agonized look.

‘Hush, Fitzroy! please don’t say anything.’

He has turned his back to his wife on purpose, for which act she could gladly have returned to him, with compound

interest, the pinches which he had shortly before inflicted on her.

‘I beg your pardon,’ says Lord Mark; ‘I dare say I am very stupid, but I fail to see what my song had to do with Lady L’Estrange; it was called “Mollie Darling.”’

‘Precisely,’ responds Sir Fitzroy. ‘What says the immortal Will?—

“And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,  
And then from hour to hour we rot and die;  
And thereby hangs a tale.”

There is a whole tale hanging from your song.’

‘Do enlighten me,’ pleads Lord Mark.

Then in a very solemn and deep voice Sir Fitzroy says :

‘My wife’s name is “Mollie,” commonly called “Mollie Darling.”’ And Sir Fitzroy looks at them all with a charmed, delighted air.

‘Gracious me!’ says Lord Mark. ‘I am

so sorry. But surely,' he continues, 'Lady L'Estrange will exonerate me from all blame in the matter. She must feel that I did not know what her Christian name was, and that, had I known, under no circumstances, especially as I had not then the honour and pleasure of her acquaintance, should I ever for a moment have dreamt of singing my favourite song, "Mollie Darling." I am most distressed that such a thing should have happened, and I can only plead for forgiveness, on one condition, that I shall not sing that song again.'

'On the contrary,' said Mollie, 'you must sing it at least three times a day, or I shall think you do not like my name.'

'If you wish it ; I will sing it as often as you desire,' answered Mark, with a very courteous bow and a most pleasant smile.

So peace being restored, and the unlucky

song explained, Mollie discovered that it was disagreeably near dressing time, and that if she wanted to put in an appearance at dinner, she had better disappear as speedily as might be into the sanctity of her own apartment, and surrender herself to the willing, careful attentions of Clifford.

It is undoubtedly true that, 'if you want to captivate a man, first arouse his interest in you;' and this, all unwittingly, Mollie had done. From the first, unknowingly and without effort, she had captivated Lord Mark by, without effort, winning his interest; and though he knew it to be useless, and he was the last person in the world to wish it otherwise, yet he had never forgotten his beautiful unknown.





## CHAPTER III.

### COURTSHIP LANE, AND A KENTISH KISSING- GATE.

‘A lane deep sunk amidst high bushes, with overhanging oaks and quivering ash, gnarled with elm, vivid holly and shaggy brambles, with wild convolvulus and creeping woodbine forcing sweet life through all.’—BULWER LYTTON.

‘Then she held forthe her lily-white hand  
Towards that knight so free ;  
He gave to it one gentle kisse.  
His heart was brought from bale to blisse,  
The tears sterte from his ee.

CHAUCER.

SOME days have elapsed since Mollie’s arrival at Stepmead Abbey. They have been days full of well-being and quiet

pleasure to her. The house is lovely ; so is the park ; and Lord D'Eynecourt has been kindness itself, so has Lord Mark. It is a fact, which Mollie in her self-communing does not for a moment deny to herself, that she has never passed a more agreeable time, or found a pleasanter companion than Lord Mark has proved himself to be. Of course, fond as she is of Fitzroy, it is also a fact that Stepmead Abbey, with its hundred-and-one comforts—that were necessities to Mollie in the old days at Earlston, but which, under the altered circumstances of a limited income and altered life, she now looks upon as unattainable luxuries—is without doubt preferable to the Red Cottage, lovely as the country round about it is, and lovely inside as Mollie with her perfect taste has made it.

It would be folly and affectation were Mollie to pretend that she prefers the Red

Cottage to any other place of abode. It is certain that Sir Fitzroy does not, and of that fact he makes no secret. On the contrary, and the truth compels us to state that he often grumbles long and loudly at the shifts a badly filled purse obliges them to resort to.

‘ There was never yet philosopher that could endure the toothache patiently ;’ and, to apply the words in another sense, ‘ there was never yet a man who could endure poverty patiently.’ Anyhow, if such a *rara avis* was to be found, it did not certainly exist in the person of Sir Fitzroy L’Estrange, Bart. Not that he was an idle or an extravagant man ; certainly not the latter, and he had no vices of drink or gambling. Give him work, and he would do it as well and conscientiously as any man living ; but the difficulty was to find work suited to him, an almost insurmountable


difficulty, as too many know when it becomes almost a matter of existence to them ; and the market is so enormously overstocked, so entirely inadequate to supply the needs of the enormous numbers of needy workers.

So you see Mollie's life had not by any means been a ' bed of roses ' since her marriage.

It is the day before the ball at Stepmead Abbey. Vivienne is expected, also Geoffrey, and the house is already full of perfect dancers and those who, the day but one after, will prove themselves good and keen shots.

Let us take a look at our Mollie as she comes down the steps into the garden, on the afternoon before the ball, a few hours before Geoffrey and Vivienne are expected. When she has gone three or four steps she stops and shades her eyes with her hand.

She is still very slight, and her waist is as small as ever, only the curves of her lovely form are more rounded, the bust is more fully developed. With the grace of her girlhood still remaining, to it is added the dignity and repose of the young wife and mother. The red-brown hair has, imprisoned among its crinkles and waves, such a goodly mass of sun-rays, that more than ever it looks like red bronze flecked with gold ; the skin is as fair, the lovely eyes as deep a blue, as on the June day when we first made her acquaintance ; but there is something which is different, which makes her the Mollie, and yet not the Mollie, of so short a time ago. Granted that of necessity she has altered with her altered life. It could hardly be otherwise with a sensitive, impressionable nature such as hers, which winces under an unkind word as others would from a sharp blow,



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and which appreciates and feels every word and look of kindness, every thoughtful act of care for her, as the best gift that can be bestowed upon her. But all this is not what constitutes the change. There is something else ; and the something is a look of intense sadness, a look as if Mollie had lost a most valued possession, in the mournful, pleading eyes—a look which certainly had never been there before, and which was as foreign to her nature and real sunny, bright character, as anything could well be. But of its existence, no matter what it was caused by, there could be no doubt. No one who had ever known Mollie in the palmy days at Earlston, before her marriage, could fail to acknowledge the fact of this sad presence. Mollie was not the person to let mere poverty affect her like this. She was too brave for that, and in difficulty she was not to be daunted. If

there was a way out of it, Mollie would find and benefit by it; if not, she would not 'cry over spilt milk,' but bravely acknowledging that 'what can't be cured must be endured,' she would make the best of things.

It was something worse than all this. It was what to many, particularly in these days, when men only seem to marry women for the purpose of neglecting them, would appear nothing at all, an everyday (as, alas! it so often is) occurrence, hardly worth noticing, certainly not worth bothering about: simply that Mollie, like many another trusting woman, had given her whole heart, all her fresh, pure affection, to the man she had married, and, too late, had realized that she had made a fatal and irreparable mistake. What the awakening to her had been only God and herself knew. For a very long time she had refused to

believe the truth ; she had thrust the hideous fact far from her. She would not credit that the most impassioned love which Sir Fitzroy had given her during their brief courtship, and in the early days of their married life, had gone, 'waned like a summer moon;' and that there was, try to delude herself as she would, not even a trace left, except in her faithful memory, to show her that such a love had ever existed and been hers.

Mollie was not silly enough to believe that life to her, any more than to anyone else, would be a perpetual courtship ; but hers had been such a very short happiness, for, with Robin's birth, that happiness had died.

Sir Fitzroy was very fond of his boy, in his way ; but he seemed to have no love or affection left for the lovely woman who had given him existence, who was Robin's



mother and his wife. So Mollie had but little indeed to make her life endurable. She might truly have said :

‘ Life counts not hours by joys or pangs,  
But just by duties done.’

For hers was not, happily for her, a nature that could console itself elsewhere for the absence of all love of which her husband made her conscious day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute.

No ; setting apart all question of right or wrong, all matter of principle, Mollie was far too proud for such a course to be either probable or possible. No ; her husband’s honour was safe in Mollie’s hands, and he knew and traded upon it. Little as he deserved that such should be the case, she would never drag his name through the horrors and mire of the Divorce Court, however much she might be tempted ; and

God only knows how Mollie had suffered, and did and would suffer. Ah! no man has a right to expose any woman, least of all the one who bears his name, and who is the mother of his child or children, to such awful temptations as these, for, for the one who is strong enough, by God's mercy and her own determination, to keep the right at all costs, thousands of women fall into that sad, that pitiful abyss, from which there is no human extrication.

The husbands who by their neglect and indifference drive those who would otherwise make them true and loving wives into sin and shame deserve any fate they may get. To some women it would be an utter impossibility, in every sense of the word, to find a refuge from the life of utter and complete loneliness of heart, soul, and spirit, that Mollie had led ever since Robin's birth. Lucky, little as he de-

served it, for Sir Fitzroy that he possessed such a wife.

There were times and seasons, not far apart, when Mollie felt as if she could stand such an existence no longer, for it was not only poverty of affection, but poverty of money, that in these sad times she had to contend with; and had it not been for the thought of Robin, her father, and Geoffrey, and the invaluable help and comfort respectfully shown her by Clifford, Mollie must have succumbed, and led the life many a woman has led before her, and that many a one will lead again.

But in the worst times, always up to now, Mollie had possessed the wise, sensible advice of Clifford, and she thanked God for it.

This was the secret of the change in Mollie's too expressive face, and a sad secret it was.

Often and often Mollie wondered whether the future would be even as the past and present had been since her marriage. She felt, indeed, ‘ Oh, hope ! oh, joy ! oh, delight ! must you for ever elude my eager arms ? Shall I never again call you mine, and so calling, keep you for ever ? ’ Often she felt that the agony of another day, another night, to face and live through, almost without hope, was well-nigh more than she could bear without going crazy. But the nights were lived through somehow, and with the dawn of day and the morning light, better and happier thoughts, more worthy of Mollie, came to comfort her, and in realizing golden moments, in looking out for the good in the bad, the joy in sorrow, the pleasure in pain, Mollie took heart again.

It is true that some lives seem all sorrow—nothing but that flourishes in

them ; all else turns to ' Dead Sea apples,' to gall and wormwood, vanity and vexation of spirit. But this is often the case because we will shut our eyes resolutely to the 'silver lining' which there is undoubtedly in every cloud, no matter how dark and threatening it may appear.

And Mollie, acknowledging that anticipation is always worse than reality, felt that she must be a victor, not a coward, in the momentary, hourly, daily strife. And, true wife as she was, whatever she might suffer, disappointed in Sir Fitzroy as she certainly was, she would not allow a word of blame to fall upon him.

For some moments Mollie looks about without success.

' Ah, there you are !' she exclaims at last, as Sir Fitzroy appears, the other side of the garden, walking lazily along, puffing away at a big cigar. Lord Mark is with

him. 'I want you to come and lionize this dear old garden with me, Fitzroy,' says Mollie.

'Quite impossible,' answers Sir Fitzroy. 'It is much too hot for any little amusement of that kind. I intend to let my tired limbs repose in that particularly inviting-looking chair, under that big cedar; and after finishing my smoke, I have every intention of recruiting my energies by a long sleep until dressing-time.'

'Do come with me, Fitzroy,' pleads Mollie, following him as he walks away leisurely.

'Certainly not!' says Sir Fitzroy. 'No I have said, and no it will be. Just think of the amount of exertion I shall have to go through to-morrow evening,' he adds plaintively.

'I shall be very happy to show you the gardens, Lady L'Estrange, if you will

*Courtship Lane.*

---

Mollie has still much affection, in spite of everything, left for Sir Fitzroy; but his action on his part decides her, and she turns to Lord Mark, and with an indifferent shrug of her shapely shoulders, says:

‘There is no accounting for Fitzroy’s vagaries. Come along, Lord Mark; I want to see the Anne Boleyn and pheasant-eyed pinks, with which I hear this garden abounds.’

So together they walk away.

For some minutes there is silence between them. Mollie holds a big black satin parasol at such an angle that her companion can only just see her face, but there is more than the suspicion of tears on the long silky lashes which fringe what Spenser aptly and happily describes as ‘heart-robber eyes.’

She is indignant that Fitzroy should not

accept my escort,' says Lord Mark. 'I know every nook of the old place, for the happiest days of my life have been passed here.'

'Never mind, Lord Mark,' answers Mollie. 'I am much obliged to you, all the same, but I will stay here with Fitzroy.'

'For goodness' sake don't, my dear!' says Sir Fitzroy, with more energy than the occasion warrants or he has yet displayed.

'Why not?' asks Mollie.

'Because I want to sleep, and not to be bothered,' replies Sir Fitzroy. 'Go with Mark; he will show you everything much better than I can.'

So saying, this very affectionate husband gives Mollie a little push away from him, and closing his eyes, without further ado composes himself to slumber.



Mollie has still much affection, in spite of everything, left for Sir Fitzroy ; but this action on his part decides her, and she turns to Lord Mark, and with an indifferent shrug of her shapely shoulders, says :

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She is indignant that Fitzroy should not

even carry out the farce and semblance of caring for her, melancholy as a tragedy though it is, before strangers, and that before Lord Mark he should show so very plainly how perfectly indifferent he is to her in reality. Her heart feels bursting, but she is too proud to show it.

Outspoken sympathy she would not brook for a moment—she is still too loyal to Sir Fitzroy for that ; but unspoken sympathy she cannot avoid, and that she feels instinctively is given to her from his heart by the courteous gentleman walking by her side.

With rare and admirable tact, Lord Mark takes no notice of her until they come to the entrance of the lane.

‘Where are we going to ?’ asks Mollie in astonishment. ‘This is a lane, and I want to go to the garden.’

‘The lane leads to the garden,’ replies

Lord Mark, smiling ; ‘you cannot get to the one without going down the other.’

So down the lovely lane they saunter slowly. Overhead the boughs are interlaced until they make a green network, through which gleam glimpses of the bright blue sky ; the leaves in some places are just beginning to alter their attire, and to don warm reds, vivid yellows, and soft tender browns ; the birds are singing as if their little throats would burst ; blue, yellow, white, and brown butterflies flit hither and thither ; dragon flies, looking like animated jewels, skim about in all directions ; honey-laden, home-bound brown velvet bees dip into each flower, and take from their cups their meed of sweetness ; and the banks are covered with a jewel-case of emeralds, pearls, turquoise, and pink-pearls, in the guise of soft velvety moss, star-like daisies, forget-me-nots, and wild geraniums.

The whole place is a vision of beauty ; the only thing that is needed is perfection in the form of human beings ; and that is amply supplied by the two walking down the path, and adding to the previous loneliness the fairness of their presence.

Without doubt they were a goodly couple—Mollie, in her youth and beauty, with her charm of manner, her sweetness and sadness ; and Lord Mark, with his good looks and power of sympathy. Good-looking he is, without a shadow of doubt. His strong, tall, stalwart form ; his sinewy, well-knit figure ; and his kind, pleasant face, with the tender grey eyes veiled by almost black lashes ; the beautiful sensitive mouth, with the slight droop at the corners, which told of the sympathising, feeling nature of the man ; and the short chestnut curls which covered his well-shaped head, all made up a *tout ensemble* in which even the most fas-

tidious would have found it difficult to find a flaw.

And the character of the man was foreshadowed by his face. He was firm, true, sympathising, tender as a woman to those who had suffered wrong or were in suffering; but unbending as iron to those who had caused the mischief. No woman's ruin lay at his door; and yet he was no prude. He had tasted life in every aspect, had seen the good and the evil, and sown his wild oats with the best of a wild crew. And it was best so; the crop of wild oats must be sown at one period or another of each one's life, unless one could be immaculate—a state of things which the manners and customs of the nineteenth century hardly help one to believe in.

The wild oats are best sown when the sower is young; they are a crop which do not improve by keeping, and to know that

in an oldish man they are yet in a great measure still to be sown is, I think, a pitiable—nay, a revolting sight!

On and on the two wandered.

‘I wonder what this lane is called?’ said Mollie at last.

She appeared to have recovered herself somewhat; at any rate, she had made an effort to throw off the unhappiness her husband’s careless, indifferent behaviour had caused her. It was bad enough to know such were his real feelings towards her; but to have another witness of and cognisant of the state of the case, this made her humiliation almost more than she could bear, even when the person who possessed the knowledge was Lord Mark. And there is no doubt that if Mollie could brook anyone knowing her unhappiness, it would be Lord Mark; for his wonderful thought and kindness, and his quiet sympathy since their

short acquaintance had begun, had done their work, and borne fruit already in the comfort and protection Mollie felt in his companionship, and in the grateful manner in which she looked for and accepted his attentions.

She felt instinctively that he might be trusted most implicitly, and she accorded him a degree of friendship that she would never have dreamt of giving to any other man. It would have been far too dangerous a game to play; the consequences might have been disastrous to both.

‘ This lane is called “ Courtship Lane,” ’ smilingly answered Lord Mark; ‘ it is a favourite resort for all the engaged or likely-to-be-engaged village couples. D’Eynecourt, with his usual kindness, leaves it free to all the villagers. So this lane has much to answer for; many a marriage has been settled in it.’

‘Probably the couples who have come to that ending have regretted more often than not that they ever saw Courtship Lane,’ says Mollie bitterly.

‘Nay,’ says Lord Mark, ‘do not take so unhappy a view of things. There are some happy marriages in this world.’

‘What says the old adage?’ retorts Mollie :

“Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure,  
Marry in haste, we may repent at leisure.”

And that, it seems to me,’ she continues, ‘is what everyone does. Their whole after-life is made up of one unceasing regret. What do half the people in the world—certainly in our world—know of the man or woman they have elected to pass their future life with before the fatal knot is tied?—nothing, absolutely nothing! Two or three meetings in a London ball-room, a dinner-party, a few walks or rides in Rotten



Row, perhaps a few days in a country house, and on this slight foundation they build a house, and expect that when the inevitable worries and troubles of married life come they will be able to weather the storm, with no better safeguard than this. It is extraordinary, but so it is, that sensible men and women, who in any other grave undertaking in life would count well from every point of view the cost of what they were about to do, and the for and against such an undertaking, should in this rashest, most heedless, thoughtless fashion rush along to their doom, by going blindfold into the snares and pitfalls of matrimony: that one pit out of which there is no possible extrication, save by shame and misery on one or both sides !'

And Mollie's great eyes glow with intense feeling as she speaks, and in the lacing and interlacing of her slim fingers

one reads her nervous temperament, that of late has been so keenly, so sorely tried.

If Lord Mark had ever doubted the state of affairs before, he can do so no longer, for Mollie, all unwittingly, has betrayed the truth by speaking out of the fulness of her tired heart. With Mrs. Browning, she could truly say :

‘ We are so tired, my heart and I.’

Most expressive words ; too sad and too true so often.

‘ You and Fitzroy had a long courtship, had you not, Lady L’Estrange ?’ inquires Lord Mark ; ‘ at least, so I have heard,’ he continues.

‘ And for once you have heard correctly,’ rejoins Mollie ; ‘ ours lasted longer than the proverbial three days. Whether the result has been any happier, when you

have known us longer you shall judge for yourself.'

Lord Mark had already formed his opinion ; and it would require a very great and wonderful change on Sir Fitzroy's part, and one that Lord Mark did not think was either probable or possible, to induce him to change his opinion.

It was unfair of Sir Fitzroy to ignore and neglect his wife in this way, and, at the same time, throw her, by his own actions and wishes, into constant daily and hourly companionship in that most dangerous of all possible places, a pleasant, liberty-loving country house, with a man so young and good-looking, so entirely fascinating and sympathising, as Lord Mark Champion, and moreover, one who seemed to take such a deep interest in Mollie and all that concerned her.

But Sir Fitzroy traded upon his wife's

sense of honour and of the fitness of things, and never troubled himself about her—what she did, or who were her companions, or how she passed her time.

This passive neglect and openly showed indifference were far harder for Mollie to bear than blows or cruel words would have been. She might, and would have had, a chance of redress in the last case, whereas in the former she had absolutely none—nothing but patient endurance. She was fathoming Longfellow's lines to the extent of their depth and meaning :

‘ Oh, how sublime a thing it is  
To suffer and be strong !’

Up to now that strength had been hers, or she could never have borne her life, so different as it was in every particular from the old days at Earlstown, and from the future that the few happy days of the

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beginning of her married life had seemed to foreshadow.

Her health, also, was not what it used to be. Since her boy's birth she had been far from strong ; she was often tired, and then she seemed to have no power of rest and repose left in her. Her brain was never quiet, and in the ceaseless worry of poverty and the heart-loneliness of her life she could rest less than ever.

By this time they had arrived at the gate which led from Courtship Lane into the quaint old-fashioned garden, which was by no means the least of the many beauties that Nature had lavished with her generous hand on the demesne of Stepmead Abbey. The gate was an odd one, so made that only one person could pass at a time, as the centre swung back and made a barrier, so that if two people came to the gate at once, one passed, and then the barrier went back

into its place and divided the one who had passed from the person who followed. This gate was embowered in blossoms which had been trained in a high arch some feet above the top of the gate. It was a mass of deep violet clematis, starry yellow jasmine, and Virginia creepers, which festooned themselves in and out in a lattice-work of floral beauty. The garden looked to the south, and the flowers grew in rich luxuriance. All round the garden was a close-trimmed yew hedge, with a lattice some five feet above it, on which all kinds of blossoms were trained that would grow in the open air.

‘Now,’ says Mollie, with a mischievous twinkle in her blue eyes, ‘I feel sure, Lord Mark, that you cannot tell me what that gate is called.’

‘No; that I cannot,’ says Lord Mark.  
‘Is there any particular name for it?’

‘ I will tell you when we return,’ answers Mollie. ‘ Are the village lovers allowed in the garden also ?’ she continues.

‘ No,’ replies Lord Mark, laughing. ‘ D’Eynecourt thinks the lane is long enough for them to settle their future lives, without wandering into the “ Garden of Eden.” ’

‘ So I think,’ answers Mollie, going through the gate into the garden as she speaks. ‘ What a good name for this lovely old place ! It is primitive and old-fashioned.’

And so, in truth, it was. In the centre was a big marble fountain, with three smaller basins rising from the centre. It was full of clear sparkling water, and was tenanted by gold and silver fish, the calm bosom of the water being thickly gemmed with white and yellow water-lilies, looking like jewels of topaz and pearls in a setting of emerald leaves. Pretty shells were at

the bottom of the fountain, over whose surface the fish skimmed hither and thither in their play, or their chase after some particularly tempting specimen of the fly-world. In one corner stood a sun-dial, with moss-grown stones, and this inscription :

‘Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end.’

And in the opposite nook was a small cottage, or rather room, of red bricks partly covered with ivy. Terraces from the top of the wall led step by step down to the fountain, each ledge being of deep-hued green grass, cut short and thick like velvet ; and at intervals round the square (which composed the garden) were flights of stone steps, with red marble vases filled with flowers. In another niche stood an aviary of rare birds of every description ; and in the fourth corner was a rustic arbour. And



as for the flowers, they were huge bouquets of perfume and sweetness, and they formed a mass of rich glowing colours, with the cool background of the hedge, that would have been an artist's delight.

All was stillness, save for the splash of the water and the songs of the birds. It was a time and scene whose soothing influences none could resist, and over poor, weary Mollie a sense of peace and hope stole gently, with unspeakable comfort.

Lord Mark showed her all the beauties of the garden, also the little room with its carpet of deer-skins and its old oak furniture, where Lord D'Eynecourt was accustomed to give his guests 'tea' when they came to the old garden.

'No doubt he would have given you some, Lady L'Estrange,' said Lord Mark, 'if he had known you wanted to come here.'

‘Well,’ answered Mollie, ‘we have stolen a march upon him, and I am glad of it. I would much rather come here and see the place quietly, instead of having a lot of tiresome, chattering people talking nonsense, and destroying with their vulgar modern dress and manners all the associations of romance with which such a spot as this is connected in my mind.’

There was an unconscious compliment to Lord Mark in Mollie’s speech which gave him pleasure to hear. It was a good feeling to him to know that she took pleasure in his society, and that she preferred his solitary companionship to that of the numerous admirers with whom she might be always surrounded, if she so willed it. And a feeling of compassion and protection for the beautiful woman by his side rose in Lord Mark’s heart, and more than ever did he resolve that, God willing, he would in

the days to come be to her the true, faithful friend on whose friendship she could under all circumstances, and at all times, most firmly rely. Such a friend, he was man enough of the world to know, unless things changed, she would greatly need, and he registered a vow that, while he lived, she should never be without him for a friend, never be in any trouble or difficulty that he had power to help her out of.

Oh that each one of us possessed such a friend ! There are many ‘ Mollies ’ in this sad world, but where shall we find a Mark Champion—ay, where indeed ? And as we ask the question in untold longing and despair, the empty echo of our own vain yearnings, of our patient, weary request, comes back to us ; and its unanswered pleading is, too often, all we ever know of the friend who might have saved us body and soul, and for the lack of whom so many

despair in this weary, heart-breaking world of to-day. But not yet, Mollie, will comfort come to you ; you must live your life, fight your own battles, content only in the knowledge—and who that has ever experienced it dare say, even for a moment, that such learning is not ‘ the peace which passeth all understanding ’?—that you are doing your duty ; and that whatever God ordains as your lot in life is the one in reality most fitted for, and suited to, you and your especial case.

‘ Won’t you rest a few minutes, Lady L’Estrange ? ’ asks Lord Mark ; ‘ you had better. I will make you comfortable in the dear little cottage ; and then I will go and get you some of the Anne Boleyn and pheasant-eyed pinks in which this old place abounds.’

‘ Yes,’ says Mollie, with a smile, ‘ I will try and rest for a little while ; you go and

get my favourite flowers. Did you know, Lord Mark,' she continues, 'that I love pinks and carnations better than any other flowers in the world ? They are so sweet and so stately always ; and they are so lovely—from almost indeed quite white to deep crimson.'

While Lord Mark walks away to his self-imposed task, Mollie, all unheeding of time and place, and the lovely picture she presents, seats herself wearily in the deep-cushioned ledge with which the windows of the cottage are ornamented. The window is wide open—she could step out of it on to the pathway with the greatest ease. She curls herself up very comfortably, with her feet tucked up into the folds of her dress ; and then, her bonny bright head resting against the background of old black oak, her glorious eyes 'veiled in a mist of tears,' she sits thinking very

deeply and very sadly, with a far-away look in them, and she falls to wondering vaguely what the future, if she ever lives to taste it, will be.

And so Lord Mark finds her when, after some little time, he returns with his nosegay. Mollie is so absorbed in her reflections, which, to judge by her too expressive face, are of a most painful nature, that when Lord Mark returns, he has time to note and cordially appreciate the fair grace and beauty of the picture before him. For some moments he stands silently gazing ; and as long as he lives, he never forgets Mollie as she looks at that moment. The picture is imprinted on his memory ; nothing but death will ever efface it. But time stands still for no man, and it is getting late, so Mark breaks the spell by saying :

‘ Here is your bouquet, Lady L’Estrange ;

I hope it pleases you? It is a quaint one, such as one does not often see.'

'Thank you so much,' says Mollie, rousing herself as if she had been asleep.

She takes the bouquet in her hand, and inhales its fragrance with enjoyment, while she touches the flowers softly with loving fingers.

'All my favourites,' says Mollie; 'love-lies-bleeding, lavender, white jasmine, monthly roses, passion-flowers, yellow jasmine, scarlet geraniums, Canterbury-bells, cardinal flowers, sunflowers, amaranth, belladonna lilies, Indian jasmine, white clarkia, maidenhair fern, chamomile, spiderwort, Marvel of Peru, mignonette and cabbage roses, carnations, and Anne Boleyn and pheasant-eyed pinks; oh, you beauties!' Mollie continues, 'I love you all! See, Lord Mark, what a mass of brilliancy and colour—red orange, purple, white, blue,

yellow orange, green, yellow, scarlet, flesh-colour, brown; and they mean beauty for ever, amiability, belief, constancy, comfort, devotion, discretion, distinction, grace and elegance, immortality, unfading beauty, energy in adversity, and "I attach myself to you." There's a collection of good things in a small compass !'

'Indeed there is!' replies Lord Mark. 'But do you know that it is getting very late, and we have some way to walk back? We must go, I am afraid, sorry as I am to leave this dear old garden.'

So together they retrace their steps to the gate. Mollie passes through, and Lord Mark is about to follow, when he suddenly stops and says:

'Lady L'Estrange, please redeem your promise to tell me the name of this quaint gate.'

'What is courtship generally the prelude



to?' responds Mollie, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes.

'Kisses, and perhaps matrimony,' replies Lord Mark. 'Undoubtedly; but what has that got to do with this gate? I fail to see the connection.'

'Very likely,' laughs Mollie. 'You haven't always lived in my beloved Kent; therefore I will kindly enlighten your ignorance. You have lived, and you shall now learn: know, good sir, that this gate is called a "Kissing Gate," and is therefore most judiciously placed at the end of this lane.'

'Dear me!' says Lord Mark, whose eyes are also twinkling with suppressed merriment. 'Who would have thought it? What a very odd gate! How innocent-looking, and yet how dangerous! I am really surprised at D'Eynecourt allowing such things loose about his orderly pre-

mises. Think of the village "lads and lasses" confronted by such a temptation—it is really very shocking! I must remonstrate with D'Eynecourt. I wonder the Vicar has not done so already.'

'Quite useless,' laughs Mollie. 'Besides, Mr. Oldham is far too sensible to do anything of the kind.'

'Well,' confesses Lord Mark, 'I know this gate is a weakness on D'Eynecourt's part; so we must e'en make the best of it, and pray for our misguided, most immoral host.'

One of Mollie's hands holds her bouquet; the other is lying on the gate, holding one of the bars. Suddenly Lord Mark says:

'Lady L'Estrange, I never like to miss an opportunity. Permit me.'

And before Mollie can prevent him, he raises her white hand gently to his lips,

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and imprints on it a kiss with old-fashioned courtesy.

Mollie blushes rosy red, and withdraws her slim fingers hastily.

‘ Won’t you keep this bit of Indian jasmine, Lady L’Estrange,’ pleads Lord Mark, ‘as a *souvenir* of to-day, and, as the flower says, “let me attach myself to you” ? You may need a friend some day—most of us do at one time or other in our lives ; let me be that friend. Though our acquaintance is, as the song says, “measured by days, not years,” yet I feel as if I had known you always, and I would fain think that you will honour me with your friendship. Believe me, I should value it more than words can express.’

Mollie looks up at Lord Mark, and shyly lifts her eyes to his. Something she sees in the honest, tender face apparently satisfies her that in granting his request she is

breaking no canon of morality or society, and that she may safely trust in Mark Champion always. So she puts out her hand, and says simply :

‘I shall be very glad to have you for my friend. No one needs a friend more than I do.’

Mark’s fingers close over hers in a strong clasp which is inexpressibly comforting to Mollie’s sore heart and most weary spirit.

Thus they return to the house.



## CHAPTER IV.

### QUATRE MENDIANTS.

‘No love is like a sister’s love,  
Unselfish, free, and pure ;  
A flame, that lighted from above,  
Will guide, but ne’er allure.  
It knows no frown of jealous fear,  
No blush of conscious guile ;  
Its wrongs are pardoned through a tear,  
Its hopes crowned by a smile.’

FRY.

‘If you see a piebald horse, and don’t think of his tail, and then wish, your wish will come true,’ murmurs Geoffrey gently, gazing the while at the approaching forms of Mollie and Lord Mark, whom he descries coming towards him through the trees. ‘Now I have not seen a piebald

horse lately—that would be difficult, “seeing as how,” as Deb says, I have only arrived about ten minutes,’ he blandly explains to Vivienne, who is standing by his side. ‘Moreover,’ he continues, ‘probably the specimen does not abound here; but, all the same, I have had my wish, and, what’s more, it has come true,’ pointing, as he speaks, to his sister, who is getting nearer and nearer.

Even as he speaks Mollie catches sight of him, and before Lord Mark can recover his astonishment, she has left him standing in solitary and dignified silence, while, swift as an arrow from a bow shot by a master hand, Mollie is speeding away with an amount of activity that shows that neither the fact of her being a wedded wife nor a mother has taken away her powers of outstripping Atalanta.

Away she goes to the brother whom she

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worships almost, and who positively adores her.

Ah, Mollie! never, while Geoffrey is spared to you, while your eyes can look upon his loved face, never can you say that you are without love in this world, and that nought bright is still your portion in life. Your heart can never be empty, never be desolate, while God in His mercy spares Geoffrey's most precious life to you. Be grateful, Mollie, while this inestimable blessing is yours. Who can tell what a day, an hour, a minute, may bring forth, may hold for you of misery and loss irreparable and unutterable?

Something of this passes through Mollie's mind as she reaches Geoffrey, and, with a sigh of relief, flings herself into his outstretched arms and kisses him many times.

'My goodness, Mollie!' says Geoffrey,

panting, 'I have no breath left ! Consider my lungs and my chest ; you are in good truth,' he continues, 'nearer and dearer.'

'Lucky you added the latter,' replies Mollie. 'If you had neglected your manners, and left out that true and most desirable ending to your speech, I should have been under the painful necessity—I really should—of giving you a sisterly pinch, just to recall you to a due sense of your duties.'

'Pray don't pinch,' murmurs Geoffrey, with a comical expression on his handsome face ; 'your powers are unequalled in that line. As you are strong, be merciful !'

'Oh, Geoff !' says Mollie, 'it is good to have you here again.'

And she looks up in his face with an expression on hers that makes Lord Mark, who has come close to them by this time, devoutly wish it were bestowed upon him.

Lord Mark has no sisters, a fact which,



up to now, has been with him a constant source of gratitude to Providence; but when he sees Mollie and Geoff he feels, for the first time in his life, that he really should not so much mind a sister if Mollie could stand in that relationship to him, and perform all its manifold duties so prettily.

‘Thank you, Mollie,’ says impertinent Geoffrey; ‘that will do, my love—more next time; like the magazines, we will say “to be continued in our next,” and I beg that that next may not take place before late to-morrow at the very earliest. Really, Mollie,’ he continues, ‘your powers in the hugging and kissing line are unequalled; matrimony has not diminished them—on the contrary.’

‘Nonsense,’ says Mollie, ‘matrimony has nothing to do with it; I keep all my kisses for you, dear old boy!’

And Mollie looks so like kissing him again, that Geoffrey holds her at arm’s

length and appeals to Vivienne to come to his rescue.

“ ‘ ‘ She has several tall Irish cousins whom she loves in a sisterly way,’ ” sings Geoffrey, in his deep rich tones ; ‘ Heaven defend them, poor fellows ! ’ he adds piously, ‘ for they need all our prayers.’ ”

By this time Lord Mark has joined them.

‘ What, Mark, old fellow ! ’ exclaims Geoffrey joyfully, wringing Mark’s hand nearly off in his cordial grasp ; ‘ who would have thought of seeing you here ? This is perfect—your arrival upon the scene is all that is wanted to make my enjoyment complete. Why, Mollie, you never told me that Mark was here.’ ”

‘ Very likely not,’ coolly replies Mollie, who is quite equal to this and any other occasion ; ‘ how was I to know that you were acquainted ? ’ ”

‘ Well, my dear,’ sarcastically observes Geoffrey, ‘ without any fearful exercise of brain—by the way, have you any ?—on your part, you might have supposed that as I have the honour of serving her Majesty in the Grenadiers, it is more than probable that Lord Mark Champion, equally serving her Majesty in the Life Guards, should have the pleasure of my valuable friendship and acquaintance.’

‘ True,’ laughs Mollie ; ‘ but then, you know, “ out of sight, out of mind ; ” and as I have not been tormented by the sight of your sweet countenance for so long, it is only just to suppose that I have forgotten your very existence.’

‘ You shall be punished for that speech, my beauty,’ says Geoffrey, making a dart to catch Mollie ; but she is too quick for him, and has already taken up a safe position indoors.

‘Go and dress, Geoffrey,’ Mollie observes, ‘or you will be late for dinner; and we all know what your appetite is—fearful!’ she adds, with a gesture of despair.

Dressing apparently takes but a short time, and now they are all assembled in the beautiful dining-room.

Mollie is sitting on her host’s right hand with Lord Mark the other side, and opposite to them are Vivienne and Geoffrey.

Norman has stayed at home to take care of Mignonne, as balls are not at all in his line; and in Geoffrey’s safe escort he can safely trust Vivienne.

Geoffrey looks radiant. His beloved Mollie is looking at him with a beaming expression from the opposite side of the table; next to her is the man Geoffrey cares for most in the world, and next to Geoffrey is the one woman in the world for him. His cup of happiness is full to over-

flowing. Geoffrey is more devoted than ever to Vivienne; the love which has grown with his growth has become so entirely part and parcel of himself that nothing on this side of the grave can ever change it, hopeless as he knows it to be.

Vivienne and Norman are a most devoted couple, and Geoffrey loves Vivienne far too well to attempt to alter that. Vivienne is very, very fond of Geoffrey; she does not realize now—that will come to her later—the depth and intensity of her affection for him, so she keeps him in order, and suns herself in the affection of her husband and her cousin.

‘What does it matter to anyone,’ says Geoffrey, to his confidante Mollie, ‘if I do care for Vivienne so much, if I like her to fill up my heart? It cannot possibly be of consequence to anyone else, as long as it

does her no harm ; and that it never will, be sure of that, my queen.'

Dinner is over, and dessert upon the table.

'Geoff,' says Mollie suddenly, 'do you know what "Quatre Mendiants" means? If you tell me correctly, I will positively kiss you ; if you don't know, you shall be deprived of that inestimable blessing for a month to come.'

'I shall never survive that,' answers Geoffrey, 'though,' he adds philosophically, 'I will do my very best to bear even that, knowing well what a calamity my early demise would be to my adoring and numerous friends. All the same,' he adds, 'I have not the least idea what you mean ; the extra twopence was paid for your education, but not for mine, apparently.'

'You are very conceited and very ignorant,' says Mollie, laughing. 'Do any of

you know ?' she asks, looking round the table.

Everyone expresses his or her ignorance. Not so Lord Mark.

' The same reward does not apply to me as to Geoff, if I tell you, Lady L'Estrange ?' he asks modestly.

' Certainly not,' exclaims Mollie hastily. ' Geoff is my brother, and you are——'

' Your friend, remember,' answers Lord Mark.

' Yes,' replies Mollie ; ' but your privileges are not the same as Geoff's. What next, I wonder ?' she adds.

' Well, anyhow,' retorts Lord Mark, ' I shall air my knowledge to an admiring audience. Know then, all whom it may concern, that—now listen well, thank you—that "*Quatre Mendiants*" means—means—means—I like to keep you waiting, it is good for you ; and, after such an excellent

dinner as we have just partaken of, it promotes digestion, and so saves the doctor's bill—means, well, just “Almonds and Raisins,” of which, thank you, Geoff, I should like immediately to partake.’

So, amid laughter and merriment, the ladies depart to the drawing-room, where they are speedily joined by the others, and, in singing and talking, the evening passes quickly away ; and very late, with Geoffrey's good-night kiss to cheer her, Mollie goes to Vivienne's room to have a ‘ crone ’ with her of many people and things, such as the hearts of women delight in and the hour is suggestive of.





## CHAPTER V.

CIRCE DYSART.

‘Come, and trip it as you go,  
On the light fantastic toe.’

MILTON.

‘The devil fisheth best for souls of men  
When his hook’s baited with a lovely limb.’

ALEXANDER SMITH.

THE next day opens fair and lovely, even as its predecessor. Geoffrey and Mollie spend the morning together, happy in their renewed companionship. Lord Mark walks about aimlessly, and is reduced to innumerable cigars for consolation in Mollie’s absence. Vivienne is deep in the mysteries of the finishing touches to a marvellous

ball dress with which she intends to adorn her dainty little figure and dazzle society in general, and poor Geoffrey in particular, at the ball. Fitzroy wanders about grumbling, seeking 'whom he may devour;' and Lord D'Eynecourt is here, there, and everywhere, seeing after and superintending the final arrangements for the festive scene that evening. At luncheon they all meet.

'By the way,' says Lord D'Eynecourt, 'I must not forget to send to the station to meet the 5.40; Mrs. Dysart comes this afternoon.'

'Who on earth is Mrs. Dysart?' asks Sir Fitzroy, with more animation than he has yet shown. He is pleased at the prospect of a possible flirtation. 'Is she good-looking and young and agreeable?'

'She is "just hersel'," laughs Lord D'Eynecourt; 'and quite enough, too, you will say when you see her. She is a "fine

figure of a woman," as my old housekeeper used to say. Now, whatever you do,' he continues, 'don't fall in love with her, my dear Fitzroy.'

'You need not be afraid of that,' cheerfully observes Mollie; 'that is a folly quite beneath Fitzroy's sympathy and notice. If he has ever fallen in love in his life, which I doubt, he has been prudent enough to forget the "sweet madness" long ago.' And Mollie looks beamingly at her husband.

'I owe you a debt of gratitude for that speech,' retorts Sir Fitzroy, 'which I shall not be slow to pay;' and his face, as he speaks, assumes an unpleasant expression. 'You are not the only woman in the world. We shall see if I have forgotten my old ways.'

'*Merci, mon cher,*' is all Mollie's reply. 'Please yourself,' she adds, 'and you will

please me. Only,' and she stops and pauses to give due weight to her words, 'I am honestly sorry for Mrs. Dysart if she is to be honoured by Fitzroy's notice. Fitzroy ought to be labelled, like the posts on a frozen lake, "Dangerous," he is made of such inflammable stuff—not like Bryant and May's matches even, which ignite "only on the box"—that the mere sight of a pretty face, no matter who it belongs to, is enough for my better half.' And with this parting shot, Mollie walks majestically away.

The afternoon passes quickly away. They are to dine early, and dress after dinner. At 6.15 a carriage drives up to the door, and Lord D'Eynecourt welcomes his guest. Mrs. Dysart, for it is she who has arrived, declines her host's offer of tea, and proceeds straight to her room to prepare for the evening's festivities.

A tremendous amount of noise and bustle, and the sound of many feet tramping up and down her passage, announces to Mollie that Mrs. Dysart has arrived; and she hears a deep mellow voice giving peremptory orders to some one, probably a maid.

Everyone is assembled but Mrs. Dysart, and dinner is announced. The door opens, and coming slowly down the brilliantly lighted room towards the guests, with a slow, firm step, as if the day was before her, walks the most gloriously beautiful woman that Mollie has ever seen. She is very tall, with the carriage of an empress, a magnificent figure, and splendid arms and shoulders, which gleam like snow against the dark crimson of her dress. Her skin was a soft clear pink, like the bloom of a peach, under which the warm blood came and went; the lips were full and deep in

colour; the teeth were magnificent. Her hair was black as a raven's wing; so were her great eyes, that melted in unutterable softness when she was pleased, but that had a gleam in their depths when she was angry that reminded those who saw her of a tiger, for their very colour changed from black to tawny yellow. A woman of strong passions, a doubtful friend, and a still more dangerous foe. Diamonds flashed and glittered all over her dress, and formed a coronet above her white brow.

Instinctively Mollie felt that she and Mrs. Dysart had met for the first, but not the last, time. Something warned her of danger to come that she was powerless to resist or alter.

'I beg your pardon, Lord D'Eynecourt,' says Mrs. Dysart, 'for being so late; but it was unavoidable.'

It was characteristic of the speaker that

she vouchsafed no further explanation for her tardiness. It struck Mollie as cool; and when she knew Mrs. Dysart better, she recalled her first feelings about her, and found how correct they were.

‘Pray don’t mention it,’ said Lord D’Eynecourt, in his pleasant, easy manner. ‘Let me introduce you to Lady L’Estrange and Sir Fitzroy L’Estrange, who will take care of you at dinner; my other guests I think you know.’

The ladies shook hands, and Mollie shivered as Mrs. Dysart’s fingers touched hers. To Sir Fitzroy’s bow Mrs. Dysart vouchsafed a slight nod of her regal head, which might, by stretching a point, be called a bow, and then she raised her eyes and met those of Sir Fitzroy fixed upon her with an admiring gaze. Apparently what she saw written in them pleased her, for

she smiled graciously, and took Sir Fitzroy's proffered arm with alacrity.

'Not to know Mrs. Dysart,' said Lord Mark to Mollie at dinner, 'is to confess yourself unknown.'

'Who is she?' asks Mollie; 'and what is her Christian name?'

'She is,' replied Lord Mark, 'leading lady, if I may so call it, of that strange new profession which belongs entirely to the last few years of the nineteenth century, which would never have been tolerated a few years ago, namely, a "Professional Beauty." She is very rich—a widow without encumbrances in the way of olive-branches, and her name is "Circe."'

'Well named, I'll wager,' says Geoffrey; who has been listening to the conversation.

'She is marvellously handsome.'

'Yes, she is,' says Mollie; 'but I know



I shan't like her'—this with profound conviction.

'No; I am sure you will not,' says Lord Mark. 'The north and south poles are not more opposite; passion and purity do not consort together—that is impossible.'

Meantime Sir Fitzroy and Mrs. Dysart appear to be getting on splendidly. That they have found many topics of mutual interest is apparent by their animated conversation—they are laughing and talking, and appear to enjoy their dinner extremely. Sir Fitzroy bends over his lovely companion with an air of devotion and deference very foreign indeed to his usual indifferent looks and behaviour on the rare occasions when he honours Mollie by his notice.

This air makes Mollie's lip turn up disdainfully, and causes Lord Mark to feel that if it pleased Providence to remove Sir Fitzroy at once to another and a better

world, it would be a matter for pious, but decided rejoicing; and also made him feel that, pending that suitable ending, a good birching would do Sir Fitzroy incalculable good, and bring him, perhaps, to a tardy sense of the prize he possessed in Mollie, which he was so slow to acknowledge and appreciate.

At this period of Lord Mark's reflections dinner, perhaps happily for all concerned, came to an end; and leaving the gentlemen to their coffee, the ladies retired to don their 'brave attire.'

Half an hour passed; the first guests would shortly put in an appearance. Fiddles are producing ominous and squeaky sounds in anticipation of the coming fray; innumerable wax candles shed a soft lustre over all; attentive servants are scudding about in all directions; all the refreshments are 'without let or hindrance,' safe in the

sanctity of the apartment set apart for the consumption of the 'cup which cheers, but does not inebriate'—in a word, everything is ready for the ball.

The room in which they are to dance is a corridor one hundred and sixty feet long, which occupies one side of the house, and is known by the name of 'The Picture Gallery.' The walls are hung with old family pictures, panelled in oak, and at fixed intervals, and from the ceiling, are dispersed various lamps and chandeliers, which shed a soft rich light over all.

The passage leading from Mollie's room opens into one end of the gallery, and down the gallery walks Mollie. She has never looked more lovely. She is robed in her favourite attire of pure white. The soft ball dress is of veils of tulle over satin, with a large bunch of hops on one side, and diamond ornaments, in the shape of carna-

tions, are on her bodice and in her hair. On the left side of her bodice is fastened, by a diamond anchor, Lord Mark's spray of Indian jasmine.

Sweetness, purity, energy, are embodied in Mollie's appearance as she walks down the gallery. At the end she meets Geoffrey ; and, wild couple as they are, they cannot resist the temptation of a valse to the music of ' My Queen,' which they induce the band to play for them.

' Oh, the delights of dancing !' says Mollie breathlessly, as she and Geoffrey fly round the room.

They are recalled to a sense of their position by the sound of voices ; but before they have time to fly, Lord D'Eynecourt appears with all his guests. In the most intense disgust Mollie and Geoffrey stop dancing, and forthwith behave themselves like ordinary mortals.

Byron's lines:—

‘The thin robes  
Floating like clouds ’twixt our gaze and heaven,’

exactly describe our Mollie's attire; and beautiful exceedingly did Mark find her when he came into the room, and saw her, himself unperceived, in the beauty and glories of full ‘costume de bal.’

Mollie always looked lovely in the evening. Her dress was always simple, but she possessed that good thing in woman which, like other things we will not name, ‘no gold can buy;’ that certain charm, the art of putting her things on properly. That cannot be given—it is born and bred with some people; as Pope justly observes:

‘What ennobles sots, and slaves, and cowards?  
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.’

So nothing in this world will give to those, who do not have it by nature's birthright, the indescribable, yet always felt, art of

being *bien mise*. It does not belong to *nouveau riches*—life has been too commonplace, hard-working, and matter-of-fact with them for that; as far as they are concerned, it is one of the very few things still left that gold will not buy.

The first quadrille is soon formed: Lord D'Eynecourt and the wife of the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Mark and Mollie, Sir Fitzroy and Mrs. Dysart, Geoffrey and Vivienne; and to the strains of Offenbach they dance right merrily.

Vivienne is resplendent in dark blue tulle, with many-hued butterflies scattered over it with a lavish hand, and with the same inconstant insects, in jewels, in her hair. She is graciously pleased to be civil to Geoffrey, and forthwith our silly youth goes from zero to blood-heat, and is, in consequence, in the seventh heaven (wherever that may be) of delight. Enjoy it while

you can, Geoffrey! the bitter ending will come all too soon, but it will not come just yet.

The ball was in full progress ; everyone appeared to be enjoying themselves thoroughly.

‘Lady L’Estrange,’ said Lord Mark, ‘may I have a valse with you?’

‘With pleasure,’ answered Mollie, smiling.

‘Will the third suit you?’ asked Lord Mark.

‘Perfectly,’ replies Mollie.

So, after some ‘duty’ dances in between, it comes to pass that it is time for Mollie and Lord Mark to have their valse. Mollie is standing by the door which leads into the conservatory, when the sounds of ‘Premier Baiser’ first break upon the silence. She looks round, wondering where Lord Mark is, for she is so fond of dancing that she

grudges keenly every moment missed from it. Hardly has she begun to search, when Lord Mark appears.

‘This is ours, I think, Lady L’Estrange.’ And in a moment they are off, floating, so to say, so lightly down the room, that their feet hardly seem as if they touched the ground ; they skim along like swallows.

‘The delights of dancing’ are fully realized by Mollie at this moment. She feels as if she had never lived before. It is a valse never to be forgotten by either of them ; and, in point of fact, it never is forgotten by either of them, to their dying day.

Meanwhile, Geoffrey and Vivienne are vying with Mollie and Lord Mark in the excellence of their dancing, and so are Fitzroy and Circe Dysart.

‘It is not often that one sees three such good couples in the dancing line in one



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room,' says Lord D'Eynecourt to his companion.

'No, indeed,' she answers; 'it is the poetry of motion to watch them.'

Sir Fitzroy decidedly has not been wasting his time; bestowing any portion of it upon Mollie is what he would be pleased to call 'waste,' and in this he is strictly economical. He and Circe have been dancing at a terrific pace, enough to make one gasp for the necessary breath of life simply and solely to look at them.

More and more plainly do Sir Fitzroy's looks express undisguised admiration. What will be the end, if such is the beginning? Not once has Sir Fitzroy spoken to Mollie during the evening; he seems quite absorbed with his new acquaintance. How long will the toy please him?

Lord D'Eynecourt's warnings were 'well meant, but useless,' for already Sir Fitzroy

seemed to be yielding to the spell of the siren, the enchantress.

Circe Dysart looked handsomer than ever. Those who knew her well would have said more 'dangerous.' There was a light in her eyes which plainly spoke of a keen determination, and showed that she had a tendency to mischief. Circe's great eyes glowed in her head like live coals ; she had a more brilliant colour than ever from her exertions in dancing ; the lace of her dress rose and fell as she tried to regain her breath.

'Oh dear me !' she sighed. 'I am out of condition. Fancy not being able to have a valse without puffing and blowing like a grampus ! What a pace you go, Sir Fitzroy !' she continued.

'Not faster than the music, I trust,' answered Sir Fitzroy. 'That would be an unpardonable offence.'

‘No fear of that,’ replied Circe; ‘your ear is too good for that; your valsing is perfect.’

‘I am indeed fortunate,’ replies Sir Fitzroy softly, looking the while at Circe with eyes that plainly speak the admiration he is already too reckless to hide, ‘to have merited your good opinion. Will you give me the first and the last valse, after supper?’

‘Yes,’ replies the ‘Siren;’ for so she is often called, chiefly from the number of men she has lured to their destruction.

Off they go again, this time stopping close to Mark and Mollie, who are standing still a moment after their exertions.

Not a word does Sir Fitzroy speak to Mollie; on the contrary, he continues his devoted attentions to Mrs. Dysart with a more *empresé* air than ever. Every tone of his voice, every look in his eyes, is an

insult to his wife, and so apparently Lord Mark thinks, for he draws Mollie's hand within his arm and leads her away to the conservatory, bestowing, as he goes, a look upon Sir Fitzroy and his companion the reverse of complimentary to either, for in it is written, so plainly that 'those who run may read,' the intense disgust he feels at such unwarrantable behaviour on Sir Fitzroy's part when Mollie is in the room. With Mollie absent it would be bad enough, but, with Mollie present, it is too bad to be tolerated; and Lord Mark, who has never since their acquaintance held Sir Fitzroy in much respect, now determines that he is beyond words to blame, and that no one could wonder at anything Mollie might do in the face of such open neglect.

As for poor Mollie, the hand which lays on Lord Mark's arm trembles visibly, and there is a piteous look about the sensitive

mouth, and in the great eyes, that betoken plainly that very little would cause Mollie to indulge in the feminine weakness of a 'good cry,' though that is a proceeding she holds in utter detestation, and tears with her are as rare as they are in a man, quite as agonizing, and never called forth except by circumstances as grave as those that might cause a man's tears to flow. No ; Mollie is Spartan-like in point of her powers of endurance on most subjects. It must be a terrible blow, a heavy trial, that could arouse in her such weakness. In spite of everything, she is still very fond of her husband, although he neglects her, and is quite indifferent to her ; and she would be fonder still if he would allow her to be so ; but if Mollie tries to make things happier, more on the old footing, between them, all she gets for her pains is a sullen, ' I wish you would leave me alone, and not

bother ; we do very well as we are,' from Sir Fitzroy ; and if she offers to kiss him, he turns away his face sullenly, and says cruelly, ' No, thank you ; I do not wish to be kissed by you.' And Mollie, hurt and miserable, checked in her love and affection where she has a perfect right to show and lavish them as much as she pleases, turns sadly away, sick at heart, and always wondering whether such a life as this, to the day of her death, will be the only life she will ever know this side of the grave.

To a loving, most affectionate, unselfish character such as Mollie's, this state of things is doubly hard—almost unendurable ; and, after all—oh, most wonderful fact in this dissolute, disreputable state of society !—Mollie only wants to be in love with, and care for, her ' own husband.'

And this he will not permit. So little does he care, that it is a matter of doubt,

if at last, in sheer desperation, Mollie liked, or allowed herself to be liked by, any of the numerous men who, on the very rare occasions when she appeared in London society, were only too ready to worship for ever at the shrine of the beautiful Lady L'Estrange, whether Sir Fitzroy would have minded in the slightest degree. More likely his sole remark would have been :

‘ What fools these men are ! What can they see to admire in Mollie ? I admired her once—how I ever could is a mystery to me. What could I have been thinking of to saddle myself with a wife of my own ? Other men’s wives are so much pleasanter ; and above all, thank Heaven ! one cannot marry them.’

Mollie sinks into a low chair that is embowered among a mass of plants. Over her head swings a silver lamp, and as a background there is a mass of beau-

tiful passion-flowers, which gleam like stars among the dark green of the foliage.

Very lovely she looks, but withal very, very sad. Her hands lie idly in her lap; her eyes have a far-away look in them.

She is thinking what a mess she has made of her life. Were it not for Geoffrey and her boy, she would almost wish she was away out of this world, 'where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' And a longing look spreads over her face as she thinks what that rest without an ending must be like.

'Don't look so sad, Lady L'Estrange,' says Lord Mark. 'What were you thinking of?'

'Wishing I was dead and buried!' answers Mollie, while she places her hand on her heart to still its beating so wildly.

'Hush!' says Lord Mark. 'You must not say or think such despairing things;



they are not worthy of you. They are an insult to your good character.' And Lord Mark takes Mollie's hand in his and presses it softly.

Mollie does not answer for some minutes.

'You are very good to me, Lord Mark,' she whispers. 'Some day, perhaps, I shall be able to thank you as you deserve.'

'I don't want any thanks,' answers Lord Mark; 'only to know that I can be of some help and comfort to you.'

'You are that already,' answers Mollie; 'and you always have been, since the day we first met here.'

'That is right,' replies Lord Mark. 'Now try and look happy and cheerful. If anything bothers you, don't think of it; if the sight of anybody distresses you, don't look at them.'

So, without putting what he knows full well is the cause of Mollie's unhappiness

into words, does Lord Mark act the part of a real, true, sincere friend to Mollie, and makes her feel that he knows all about her troubles, and would help her to bear them.

Thus comforted beyond what a short time before she would have believed possible, Mollie and Lord Mark return to the ball-room.

‘Come and have some supper, Lady L’Estrange,’ says Lord Mark. ‘You look as if it would do you good.’

So they wend their way to the supper-room. The only vacant places are at a table where Sir Fitzroy and Mrs. Dysart are seated.

‘Let me come and sit by you, Fitzroy,’ says Mollie.

‘Much obliged, but there isn’t room,’ responds Sir Fitzroy. ‘You must wait until Mrs. Dysart and I have done our repast.’

‘Lady L’Estrange is much too tired to stand,’ replies Lord Mark. ‘Give her your chair, L’Estrange.’

And, much against his will, Sir Fitzroy is obliged to make room for his wife next to him, as he refuses to leave Mrs. Dysart.

‘Dear me, what a fuss!’ laughs the latter. And with a sneer she continues: ‘What an attentive cavalier you have, Lady L’Estrange!’

‘Yes,’ replies our Mollie, with spirit. ‘I am, luckily, not dependent upon my husband for the civility which is my due.’

And with that Mollie turns her back upon the other two, and begins an animated conversation with Lord Mark, who has got a seat somehow.

‘Got it hot this time, and no mistake!’ murmurs the incorrigible Geoffrey, who has come up quietly, in time to hear Mollie’s answer, and who, standing behind her

chair, is chuckling over the neat rebuke Mollie has administered to Mrs. Dysart.

The latter is sitting in a state of rage, glancing at Mollie, and hardly paying attention to Sir Fitzroy's gallant speeches.

There is no doubt about it, it will be war to the knife between the two ladies, and both Lord Mark and Geoffrey will take Mollie's side, as they have a decided dislike to Circe and her performances.

'Upon my honour,' growls Geoffrey, as Sir Fitzroy and Circe leave the table, and, sweeping past Mollie and her staunch protectors, leave the supper-room, 'Fitzroy is too bad. If he goes on like this, there will be a row between him and me.'

'Never mind, Geoff,' says Mollie, with a forced laugh; 'don't let's bother ourselves with Fitzroy's likes and dislikes; he changes as often as the wind.'

So saying, Mollie takes Geoffrey's arm,

and, followed by Lord Mark and Vivienne, they return to the ball-room. So the evening slips rapidly away.

Sir Fitzroy and Circe are inseparable ; they dance together constantly, and really are the talk of everyone present.

Bitterly does Lord D'Eynecourt regret that Mrs. Dysart should have come to Stepmead Abbey at this particular time ; but she had proposed herself on the strength of a half-invitation Lord D'Eynecourt had given her in the season, when she had told him she was coming into Kent, and he had foolishly murmured something about the ' hoped-for pleasure of seeing her at his place,' which he had forgotten all about as soon as given, but which Circe was not the woman to forget—hence her unlucky presence at Stepmead Abbey now. The mischief's done, however, and there is nothing to be said.

It is getting late, or rather early, and the guests are rapidly departing; soon sleep and silence will reign where now all is wakefulness and merriment.

The last valse has been danced, and, as usual, Sir Fitzroy and Circe have danced it together. He is becoming more and more reckless; in very truth, he seems to have drunk of the cup which Circe has held out to him to the very dregs, and its fumes have intoxicated him to the extent of making him forget everything and everybody.

It is a sad future for Mollie if this is the beginning, though for a long time she had felt that some such conclusion as this would sooner or later be the inevitable ending, with a man like Sir Fitzroy, to her short dream of married love and happiness. It was a very bitter awakening.

Sir Fitzroy and Circe had certainly

distinguished themselves ; and as he handed her a light for her candle as he bade her good-night, he held her hand in a grasp that was warmer and longer than the occasion at all called for. When she had disappeared into the privacy of her own apartments, Sir Fitzroy drank off a B.-and-S., and disappeared to his room, with just the curtest good-night to the company.

‘ Geoff, come here,’ says Vivienne imperiously.

Geoffrey obeys with alacrity—when did he ever do anything else when Vivienne deigns to be kind to him, as she has been this evening ?

‘ Geoffrey,’ whispers Vivienne, in his ear, with her soft lips very near to his, ‘ if I thought for one moment that Norman would ever behave to me like Fitzroy does to Mollie, I should—yes, I really should—be under the painful necessity of hanging

myself. Does hanging hurt much, do you think?' she continues gravely.

'I should say so,' laughs Geoffrey; 'anyhow,' he goes on, 'let me implore you not to try it—put it off a little. I have seen symptoms of alteration on Norman's part, now I come to think of it; but I will let you know, Vivienne, when they are more fully developed. Put off the final catastrophe a little longer, my darling—you can always hang yourself as a last resource; besides, I have a remedy for you,' he continues mischievously.

'What is it?' asks Vivienne curiously. 'Tell me at once, I am dying of curiosity.'

'Run away with me,' replies Geoffrey. 'You can always hang yourself if I don't turn out better than Norman; and you know you ought to have married me, not Norman at all, so you owe me some recompense. What do you think of my plan?'



Geoffrey asks, looking so fondly at the piquante charming face and figure of the one woman in this world for him.

‘Think!’ retorts Vivienne, ‘that you are talking as usual the most arrant nonsense, for which, if you were a little younger, you would assuredly deserve to be well whipped constantly until cured of such folly.’

‘The birch-rod is not made, fair dame,’ says Geoffrey, ‘that will cure me of such folly, if folly it be—which I, for one, do not call it, and you are paying yourself but a bad compliment to say so. I wonder,’ Geoffrey continues, ‘why I have loved you all my life, Vivienne—from the days when you were a darling, wicked little child until now? and why, as long as I live, I shall always love you, and you only?’

‘Oh, hush, Geoff!’ pleads Vivienne, distressed; ‘don’t talk so, it is not right; I must not listen to you!’

‘I won’t say so again,’ answers Geoffrey sadly, ‘though I shall think so always, for you are never absent from my thoughts night or day ; but you know as well as I do that I should never say a word to you, or ask you to do a single thing that would be breaking your vow to dear old Norman, whom I honour and like truly. If yours was a fate like Mollie’s—God help me ! I know not what I should do ; but, Vivienne, you have the inestimable blessing of a good and devoted husband. He knows how truly I care for you ; and though he is the only man in the world I envy, yet he trusts me and you fully ; and he is right, for his honour is safe in my keeping. I don’t know why I have said all this to you to-night, Vivienne,’ continues Geoffrey ; ‘I have always wanted to do so. Nay, don’t cry, my pet,’ he breaks off, as the tears roll slowly down Vivienne’s cheeks ; ‘I can’t bear to see that ;

but I feel so much better and happier now you know the whole truth. It is one burden lightened. Give me one kiss, Vivienne, just for old sake's sake,' he pleads.

They are in the conservatory, away from all prying eyes.

As he speaks Geoffrey draws nearer to Vivienne, and holds out his arms to her. She raises her sweet face to his, and he gives her soft lips a pure tender kiss—it was the only time since she married that Geoffrey had ever kissed her—in which there is nothing of earthly passion—such a kiss as we might give our beloved dead. So great was Geoffrey's love for Vivienne, that it had elevated and purified his nature, for passion had no place in such a feeling, all was pure gold, the dross for ever washed away. And in the days to come, when the future, with all its trouble, had been lived

and suffered, and had become a thing of the past, Vivienne looked back upon that evening with gratitude, and thanked God that once in her life she had known the pure deep love of which all her life she had been the object ; and that from some unaccountable, but irresistible impulse, she had granted Geoffrey the kiss he had so often, so unsuccessfully pleaded for. Then they rejoin Lord Mark and Mollie, and in a few minutes they disperse.

‘God bless you, my queen!’ whispers Geoffrey fondly to his sister, as with his arm round her waist they proceed up the stairs together. ‘Don’t worry about Fitzroy ; he will soon recover his latest insanity. I will take care of you ; remember that always.’

‘Oh, dear old man!’ sobs Mollie at last. ‘I am so unhappy ! It is such a terrible life to lead ; so different from what I ex-

pected. Do you think it will always be like this, Geoff? I feel so lonely.'

It is Mollie's first complaint of her husband, and only to Geoffrey would she make it.

'No; it will all come right,' whispers Geoffrey consolingly. 'May I be forgiven that fib!' he murmurs aside to Vivienne, who is standing by. 'Dry your eyes and go to bed, and we will have a talk to-morrow.'

Thus at last they part. The last thing Lord Mark sees of Mollie is a lovely face with tears standing on the long lashes, that she is wiping away as she kisses a final good-night to Geoffrey and Lord Mark, as she shuts the door of her room.

'Mark,' says Geoffrey, 'I should like to kick Fitzroy.'

'And I should like to tell him what I

think of his conduct, and then give him the thrashing he deserves so richly,' responds Lord Mark, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WILES OF THE ENCHANTRESS.

‘Thy heart is haunted with a sense  
Of all a brother’s charms dispense.  
His picture on the bedroom wall,  
How frequently its lines recall  
The imperial face, the manly brow,  
The eyes that dared the soul avow;  
The soul that knew no mean eclipse,  
But ever round those graceful lips  
In brightest welcome played for thee,  
In words of unaffected glee.’

R. MONTGOMERY.

THE next day was the time-honoured ‘First of September.’ The day after, the party would break up and go their several ways. In spite of the lateness, or rather earliness, of the time when they had retired for what was still left of the night, after the exer-

tions of the ball, all the guests assembled round the well-spread, tempting breakfast-table by half-past ten next morning, the gentlemen attired in correct 'costume de chasse.'

'Lady L'Estrange,' said Lord D'Eyncourt, 'will you honour us with your presence at luncheon? Most of the other ladies are coming.'

'I shall be very pleased to do so,' answered Mollie, who, with no outward traces left of the misery of the previous evening, was looking as sweet and fresh as a full-blown rose, with keen eyes sparkling with fun, and her lovely hair shining in the morning sun.

'What lovely hair your sister has!' observes Circe, who has actually put in an appearance, although, as a rule, she is not visible to mortal eyes, her maid always excepted, before two o'clock brings luncheon.



She has seated herself next to Geoffrey, much to that hero's disgust, and is prepared to promptly subjugate this young gentleman, and bring him to his proper place at her feet, a captive bound hand and foot in the chain of her charms.

Circe has seen signs that lead her to believe that Geoffrey's attentions are not for her, that they will be bestowed elsewhere, a state of things she is quite unaccustomed to, and that her overweening vanity will not for one moment allow her to contemplate as possible. Circe needs a sharp lesson, and Geoffrey will teach her one, a repetition of which she would carefully guard against in the future.

'Yes,' replies Geoffrey, 'my sister has lovely hair; and, what is more, it owes nothing to art. Hers are the tresses with which Nature has endowed her.' And he looks fixedly at his neighbour.

‘Horrid boy!’ murmurs Circe to Sir Fitzroy, who is seated on her right hand.

‘I quite agree with you,’ replies Sir Fitzroy. ‘Geoff, what do you mean by saying such things to Mrs. Dysart?’

‘I never said they were meant for her,’ retorted Geoffrey.

‘Perhaps not,’ said Sir Fitzroy; ‘but you insinuated as much.’

‘Pardon me,’ coolly observes Geoffrey; ‘I never insinuate—I say what I mean; and, if the cap fits Mrs. Dysart—she knows best whether it does or not,’ this with an impertinent, provoking bow to the lady in question—‘I really cannot help it. If ladies will alter their hair, they must submit to the opinions such a change may call forth, as this is a free country, and we may say what we like.’ With this conclusion, Geoffrey pushes his chair back from the table, and without vouchsafing so much as a look or a

word to the silly couple, walks out of the room, followed by Mollie, Vivienne, and Lord Mark.

‘ Oh, Geoff, you are a brave boy !’ laughs Vivienne. ‘ Madame Circe will never forgive you that speech about her dyed locks.’

‘ I don’t care whether she forgives me or not,’ responds Geoffrey. ‘ She and all that concerns her are matters of pure indifference to me. I should like,’ he continues, ‘ to give her one piece of advice.’

‘ What is that ?’ asks Lord Mark.

‘ Why, to warn her,’ answers Geoffrey, ‘ not to meddle with anyone that belongs to this little woman here, or she shall answer to me for it.’ And Geoffrey gives Mollie a loving look as he speaks.

‘ I should think you have shown her that pretty plainly already,’ laughs Mollie. ‘ I really thought you were coming to blows with Fitzroy. Do you know, Geoff,’ she

continues, 'I am afraid you were very rude to Mrs. Dysart.'

'I dare say I was,' growls Geoffrey. 'I am sure I hope I was, for it is what I meant to be; and though as a rule I trust I am always courteous to ladies, I can't stand Mrs. Dysart, and people of that kind. Remember, I knew her before, and am aware of her true character. Come along, Mollie; one turn in the garden before we start.'

So away the four go. Half an hour later the sportsmen have departed. At half-past twelve the ladies start to join them, and they arrive safely at the farmhouse where they are to lunch.

The luncheon is soon unpacked; and as everyone prefers the open air to a stuffy farm-house, on such a splendid day, they agree to spread the good cheer in a sheltered spot at the back of the house, where

huge haystacks keep off the slight amount of breeze there is.

Very picturesque they all look, with tired dogs lying panting on the ground, and groups of beaters and keepers in their velvet suits standing in all directions.

Nothing of the repast has been forgotten, wonderful to relate, and the salt and cream, the butter and mustard, have kindly kept each in their own respective departments, which adds materially to the comfort of those assembled to assist at the feast.

‘We must not be very long,’ observes Lord D’Eynecourt, raising, as he speaks, a tankard of good strong ale to his lips, and in it pledging the company generally; ‘the days, alas! are already beginning to draw in, and I want to show a larger bag on the First than any of my neighbours.’

So, to aid him in the fulfilment of this laudable and very pardonable ambition—

seeing that Lord D'Eynecourt owns a very large amount of shooting, and that the 'wily partridge' is particularly abundant in Kent this year—the guests finish their luncheon with more haste than regard for their digestions, and prepare once more to start.

Geoffrey and Lord Mark have Mollie and Vivienne for their boon companions, leaving Circe and Sir Fitzroy to the enjoyment of their continued flirtation.

The short September day soon draws to an unwelcome close, for Mollie has keenly enjoyed the hard walking, the trudging over turnip-fields carrying Geoffrey's cartridges, and the scrambling through hedges and over ditches which have fallen to their share. Very good sport indeed have they had.

As the daylight begins to disappear, Mollie and Geoffrey, arm-in-arm, trudge

lovingly homewards, followed by Mark and Vivienne.

‘How glorious!’ says Geoffrey, suddenly stopping, as with uplifted hand he points to the setting sun.

The whole sky is one mass of crimson clouds with edges of gold, so bright, so vivid, that it seems as if some vast fire was going on, and was making a huge illumination of its own, the brightness of which no light that is the work of man can in the very faintest degree approach. The trees and hills stand out in distinct relief against the flood of crimson, and the figures of Mark and Vivienne, Mollie and Geoffrey, are plainly discernible in the lovely landscape.

‘What can be more glorious than this?’ says Geoffrey. ‘Only one thing, I think—the light of eternity.’

And then the quiet of the evening air is

broken by Geoffrey's lovely voice, as with his hat off and his beautiful face raised to heaven, he sings, with unutterable pathos and longing :

‘The roseate hues of early dawn,  
The brightness of the day,  
The crimson of the sunset sky,  
How fast they fade away !  
Oh for the pearly gates of heaven !  
Oh for the golden floor !  
Oh for the Sun of Righteousness  
That setteth nevermore !’

And Mark's rich tones join with his, blended with those of Mollie and Vivienne.

For many days does that song ring in their ears, and the memory of it lingers with some of them as long as their life does last.

‘If such words as these :

“ Oh for a heart that never sins !  
Oh for a soul washed white ! ”’

says Geoffrey yearningly, ‘ could only



in truth, if only in a measure, be said of us, how happy we should be !'

And over his face sweeps that strange look of rapture, of beauty, which sometimes passes over it, giving it a curious charm, a marvellous, pathetic look.

'My darling !' whispers Mollie fondly ;  
'if you cannot say it, no one can.'

And she is right ; for the upright, good, honest life led by Geoffrey Adair is that of a pure, simple, God-fearing man, simple with the unquestioning faith of a little child, and beautiful withal exceedingly ; it is full of the 'charity which thinketh no evil ;' it is replete with good deeds, and in its singleness of heart and purpose is an example indeed to all high-principled men and women. No woman has cause to regret the day when she first made Geoffrey Adair's acquaintance ; and though he is no prude, but a man of the world, yet he has kept his

heart innocent in the midst of the snares and pitfalls that beset the path of every young man. He is an excellent soldier, and as a son and brother he is hard to equal, and impossible to excel. As Montgomery says :

‘ A brother ! oh, that thrilling name,  
It vibrates through my very frame !’

So such a thought as this came into Mollie’s mind, and found a loving echo there. They were so wrapped up in each other, these two ; their likes and dislikes, their amusements and pleasures, were one and the same, and their partings had been but few until Mollie’s marriage.

‘ Tell me, my darling,’ says Geoffrey tenderly, ‘ is there anything I can do to make things better between you and Fitzroy ? for it makes my heart ache to see you ; and although, as a rule, I am a very strong advocate in favour of letting hus-

bands and wives settle their differences without outside interference, especially that of relations, yet "circumstances alter cases," and I cannot stand by and see you badly treated without raising a finger to help you.'

'No, Geoff; there is nothing you can do,' sighs Mollie wearily. His tenderness is such a contrast to her husband's neglect that she feels sick at heart as she listens, and yet she is still too loyal to Sir Fitzroy to like to hear anything in his disparagement said, little as he deserves such consideration, and little as he would stick by her under such circumstances.

Mollie may and does acknowledge to herself—how can she help doing so? she would not be human if she did not—the enormous difference between Sir Fitzroy her lover, with all to gain, and Sir Fitzroy her husband, with the charm and novelty of

her for his wife worn off, ended, with little more than the end of their honeymoon. But it does not follow that because Mollie bows to, and in sorrow and loneliness accepts this hard fact, she will allow the outside world to know it. She may blame Sir Fitzroy, but no one else shall as long as she can help it. She will work for him, and shield him from the censure he so richly deserves, as long as it is any way possible to do so. Therefore, in her loyalty, Mollie tells Geoffrey that 'he can do nothing for her.'

It is true that she told Geoffrey last night, in a moment of weakness, that 'she was very unhappy, that hers was a terrible life to lead, so different from what she had expected ;' and it is equally true that when Mollie's despair forced these words from her, she was only speaking the strict truth ; but Mollie would not say anything

more. She must make alone the best of her life in the present and future—if a future is granted to her.

‘But, Mollie,’ Geoffrey persists, ‘I have eyes in my head, and I can see as far as most people into a stone wall, putting Fitzroy aside altogether. Tell me, at least, about your money worries. I know they are heavy.’

‘Indeed they are,’ sighs poor Mollie. ‘I really think they are the worst to bear of the lot that has fallen to my share. You know,’ she continues, ‘we were never overwhelmed at any time with a surfeit of this world’s gold, and since Robin was born’ (the boy had been decorously christened ‘Geoffrey Fitzroy,’ after his uncle and father, but Geoffrey had always declared that, with his rosy cheeks and great sparkling eyes, framed in a thick mass of brown curls, he looked like nought else but a

‘robin,’ so the name had stuck to him, and he was now never called anything else), ‘it seems more difficult than ever to make things go right. If it was not for Clifford, I do not know what I should do.’

‘Excellent woman!’ says Geoffrey. ‘I have the greatest liking and respect for her, which she well deserves. How long has she been with you, Mollie?’

‘Twenty-two years,’ answers Mollie; ‘ever since I was born—a whole lifetime, in point of fact. I hope and trust,’ she continues, ‘that she will never leave me. I should be perfectly lost without her; and even Fitzroy is quite civil to her, a fact which, though last, is by no manner of means least.’

‘I am afraid you have to work very hard, Mollie,’ says Geoffrey, ‘with your perpetual painting.’

‘Oh, I don’t mind that,’ answers Mollie.

‘I would not be without employment for the world. I think I should go crazy if it was not for my work; and I do not care about being rich. All I want is to live comfortably and to get rid of this weary burden of debt. When I first married,’ she continued, ‘I am afraid I was extravagant. All my life, at dear old Earlston, I had had all I wanted. You know you and the Patriarch spoilt me, and I really had very little idea of the value of money, or how far it would go, or what housekeeping cost; so I know I often bought things I did not really need, in spite of all Clifford’s wise remonstrances. Then there came the difficulty of paying, and now, though I never buy anything for myself, still there are the old debts to be paid off; and, until that is done, I am beset on every side.’

‘“Sore let and hindered in the race that is set before you,”’ quotes Geoffrey. ‘Well,

never mind, Mollie ; I will do what I can for you ; and were it not for bad times, I could do much more. But as far as it lies in my power, I will help you as long as I live, for you deserve it.'

So, Mollie comforted by Geoffrey's constant sympathy, they walk quickly on to the house. Just as they enter, Geoffrey stops, and looking back to where Mark and Vivienne are quietly standing, not liking to intrude upon the brother and sister's talk, he puts his hands on Mollie's shoulders, and looking into her eyes, says :

'Yonder is a real good fellow, Mollie. Promise me,' he continues, 'that if anything happens to me, you will let Mark Champion be your friend and adviser always.'

'Geoff!' says Mollie, in the utmost alarm, 'you do not feel ill, do you? Oh, don't



talk like that! I could not bear my life without you !'

'Never felt better in my life!' says Geoffrey, laughing. 'And, Mollie, do not say you could not bear your life without me. It is wrong, dear, to say so; and though I hope I may be spared to torment you for many a long day to come, yet who can tell? our times are not in our own hands; it will be as God wills. Anyhow, promise me, Mollie darling, will you?'

'That I will,' answers Mollie; 'and I can do so with real pleasure, for though my acquaintance with Lord Mark only dates from the day of my arrival here, yet we are firm friends already, and I feel as if I could trust him with any secret, and ask his advice upon every subject. You do not think,' says Mollie musingly, 'that Lord Mark is a "fair weather friend" only?'

'I know he is not,' answers Geoffrey

heartily, 'for I have seen him tried. If he had been that most odious of all characters, I should not have recommended him to you, Mollie, as for you I want a friend who will never change, and that Mark Champion is, and will be to you. We had a talk about you,' he continues.

'What did you say?' asks Mollie eagerly; 'do tell me, Geoff.'

'Some day, perhaps,' says Geoffrey, 'not now, it would make you too vain; go and imagine all sorts of delightful speeches. What a person you are for "cuddling," Mollie!' continues Geoffrey, as his sister nestles into his arms and lays her head upon his shoulder, with an expression on her face of entire content and well-being.

'Very likely,' replies Mollie; 'you taught me. I hope you are proud of your pupil; I was getting quite stupid about it, for lack of practice.'

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‘What!’ says Geoffrey the incorrigible, ‘don’t you embrace Fitzroy very often?’

‘I should think not!’ severely and indignantly answers sweet Mollie; ‘that would indeed be time and trouble wasted.’

‘Never mind, Mollie,’ replies Geoffrey, ‘I am graciously pleased to tolerate the process of cuddling from you as long as you are graciously pleased to bestow it upon me. God bless and help you now and always, my darling sister.’

And with this last fond speech Geoffrey sends Mollie off to dress.

Dinner passes off much like its predecessors: there is a feeling of sadness over them all; only Circe and Fitzroy seem impenetrable to anything unpleasant, and absolutely forgetful of everyone except themselves. Theirs is certainly the most barefaced flirtation that ever was indulged

in—the only notice it merits is that of silent but profound contempt, and that is accorded to them by most of those present.

‘Lady L’Estrange,’ says Lord Mark, ‘this time to-morrow we shall be all scattered ; but I hope you will let me come and see you soon, and that you will not forget your promise of friendship between us ?’

‘No fear of that,’ answers Mollie ; ‘I am not likely to forget such a friend as you have been, and I hope you will still be to me. Will you come down and stay with us at the Red Cottage ?’

‘That I will, with pleasure,’ answers Lord Mark, with the utmost alacrity ; ‘when may I come ?’

‘You are impatient,’ laughs Mollie.

‘Perhaps you may change your mind, Lady L’Estrange,’ answers Lord Mark.

‘ You know the old saying, “ Strike while the iron is hot,” and I am only acting upon it.’

‘ I never change my mind,’ answers Mollie ; ‘ and if you presume to think I do, I shall cancel my invitation.’

‘ For mercy’s sake don’t do that !’ pleads Lord Mark ; ‘ that would be the “ last straw which breaks the camel’s back ;” do anything but that, most potent sovereign.’

And he looks so comical, and yet so much in earnest, that Mollie laughs, and forgives his impatience.

‘ I cannot fix a day for certain,’ she says, ‘ until I have spoken to Fitzroy ; but if you will give me your direction, I will write to you.’

‘ The Marlborough Club will always find me,’ answers Lord Mark.

And with Mollie’s promise of writing he is forced to be content for the present.

‘Just one song, Mark, before we part,’ requests Geoffrey.

Lord Mark moves towards the piano.

‘What shall it be?’ he asks.

‘“Mollie Darling,”’ answers Geoffrey, without thinking.

Then once again the air rings out that Mark sang the night of his introduction to Mollie; and standing half hidden by the curtains, robed in garments of purest white, with no ornament save a spray of Indian jasmine, with Geoffrey’s arm round her waist, and her arm round his neck, with a choking feeling at her throat, and hot tears welling up to the depths of her sad lovely eyes, Mollie once again listens to that voice, and that song which—she is one of those ‘who,’ as Marston says, ‘are not carved from stone, and cannot hear music without emotion’—as long as she lives, will always be connected in her mind now with Step-

mead Abbey, with Geoffrey and Mark, and with the beginning of an acquaintance that may ripen into the most blessed gift of her sorely tried life, and prove a life-long treasured friendship.

‘Very improper song, I must say!’ whispers Circe into Fitzroy’s too willing ear; ‘how can Lord Mark sing such things, and Lady L’Estrange listen to them? I declare,’ she continues, ‘it makes me feel quite shy and uncomfortable. Did you hear the words, Sir Fitzroy?’ And in spite of her horror at such proceedings Mrs. Dysart hums, ‘Let your answer be a kiss.’

It is a challenge; and so Sir Fitzroy interprets it, as Circe’s eyes look into his, with a thousand devils lurking in their passionate depths. She is half lying in a crimson-velvet chair, whose old oak frame sets off the whiteness of her arms and

throat ; and she is lovely enough, with a bad woman's beauty and unscrupulousness, to make any man lose his head.

Sir Fitzroy does not even attempt to overcome the temptation ; for the moment, at any rate, he is madly, idiotically in love with her.

‘ I did hear,’ he murmurs hoarsely ; ‘ and this is my reply.’

Another moment, and Sir Fitzroy will have shut Circe Dysart's lips with a kiss, when a hand is placed upon his shoulder, and a voice says to him :

‘ Lady L'Estrange is going to bed, and so is Mrs. Standish.’

With a muttered exclamation, the reverse of polite, Sir Fitzroy springs to his feet as Lord Mark—for the voice was his—walks contemptuously away, without taking any further notice of Sir Fitzroy and Circe.

‘ Oh, dear me !’ says Circe, ‘ how impul-



sive you are, Sir Fitzroy; my character will be quite ruined by your impudence. What were you thinking about to attempt to do such a thing?' and she frowns at him severely. 'Do you think,' she continues, 'that Lord Mark saw us? and that he will say anything about it?'

'Of course he saw us!' growls Sir Fitzroy. 'We are neither of us invisible, or so slight that we cannot be seen; but I do not suppose he will say anything about it.'

And then, both very cross at this untoward ending to their evening, Sir Fitzroy and Circe bid each other a ceremonious good-night.

Mollie also had been a witness of the scene, though Lord Mark did not know it, for a looking-glass hung on the wall opposite to where she was standing.

Geoffrey's head was turned the other way

at the time, so he was none the wiser ; and lucky for Sir Fitzroy that such was the case, for Geoffrey's wrath would have known no bounds.

It was a shock to Mollie that was indescribable ; she felt, as she walked up the stairs and into her room, as if some one had dealt her a heavy, stinging blow, the force of which seemed almost to take away her senses. For a time she remained as one stunned, and then with shaking fingers she began to undress.

Vivienne knocked at her door, but she said she was too tired to talk, and did not let her in.

For a long time her thoughts towards her husband were bitter ones. No wonder, for she had been grossly insulted. But by degrees the natural sweetness of her character asserted itself, and she resolved that Sir Fitzroy should not know what she had

seen, but that she would endeavour, more than ever, to win him back to the right path from which he had so very grievously strayed.

Sir Fitzroy knew that Mollie must have seen him, and he dreaded, like all cowards, her just anger. But when he came up Mollie was safe in Vivienne's room, from which she did not emerge until hours after Sir Fitzroy was snoring. So, for the time being, he was safe ; and so he was altogether, as never by word or deed did Mollie allude to the subject.

Outside the door, on his way to bed, Geoffrey sang—

“ For I love you, Mollie, darling,  
You are all the world to me.” ’

The song was echoed by Lord Mark, and somehow Mollie felt cared for and comforted, in spite of all.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE RED COTTAGE AND ROBIN.

‘The road to home happiness lies over small stepping-stones. A cold, unkind word checks and withers the blossom of the dearest love, as the most delicate rings of the vine are troubled by the faintest breeze.’

JESSE.

‘Living jewels dropped unstained from heaven.’

POLLOK.

VERY early the next morning they have all left Stepmead Abbey and their kind, pleasant host.

It has been a visit fraught with incident, like a ship laden with a cargo of wines, some good, some bad. Much has truly happened in a very short time, a great deal that may—nay, probably will—very mate-

rially alter the lives of several, if not of all, of those who have formed the members of the pleasant gathering there.

From the same steps where Lord D'Eynecourt had 'welcomed the coming guests' he now 'speeds the parting ones.'

The first to depart are Geoffrey and Vivienne : he escorts her as far as London on his road to Aldershot ; then Circe Dysart departs alone, with a slight bow to Mollie, and a whispered 'Good-bye,' etc.—the end of which speech, perhaps luckily, no one hears but themselves—from Sir Fitzroy, as he holds her hand in a much longer grasp than is at all necessary ; and then the carriage drives up that is to convey Sir Fitzroy and Mollie to the station on their road home to the Red Cottage.

'Good - bye, my dear,' says Lord D'Eynecourt, for Mollie's sweetness and

beauty have quite won his heart, 'and thank you for coming; and, remember, I shall expect to see you here next year if all is well, and very often in London.'

Mollie replies that they will gladly come, and then Lord Mark hands her into the carriage.

Sir Fitzroy is getting a light for his cigar, and having a few last words with his host.

Lord Mark leans his arm on the carriage-door, and looks at the fair face which soon, for a time at any rate, he will see no longer, and he gazes at Mollie with his soul in his eyes.

'Good-bye!' at last says Lord Mark; 'and take care of yourself, Lady L'Estrange. Remember, I am coming to the Red Cottage very soon. If you do not soon write, I shall propose myself.'

‘I will not say good-bye,’ says Mollie ;  
‘it is a word I cannot bear.’

‘Do you know what it means?’ asks  
Lord Mark.

‘No,’ replies Mollie.

‘It means, “God be with you !”’ answers  
Lord Mark. ‘Surely you will let me say it  
very sincerely now you know its real  
meaning?’

‘Yes, indeed I will !’ says Mollie ; ‘and  
thank you for telling me. I shall always  
think of it quite differently now.’

And so saying, Mollie holds out her hand  
to Lord Mark, who presses it warmly, and  
lifts it gently to his lips.

Then Sir Fitzroy springs into the car-  
riage and takes his seat beside his wife.  
Turning to Lord Mark, he says cordially :

‘Mind you report yourself at the Red  
Cottage soon, old fellow, or I shall come  
and look you up.’

‘Thank you, I will,’ coldly answers Lord Mark, who is still too much disgusted at Sir Fitzroy’s conduct of the previous evening to find it in his heart to be more than decently civil to him.

This Sir Fitzroy knows and feels, and secretly resents ; but it is his policy to keep well with Lord Mark if possible, as he holds his secret in his power.

A few turns of the wheels, and in a cloud of dust the high-stepping horses have wheeled Sir Fitzroy and Lady L’Estrange on the first stage of their homeward journey, and the last glimpse Lord Mark gets of Mollie is her sweet face beyond Sir Fitzroy’s, while the latter smokes on moodily at his cigar.

‘Thank God, Circe Dysart is gone!’ piously exclaims Lord D’Eynecourt ; ‘and as sure as my name is D’Eynecourt she has put foot in my house for the first and



last time. She is a real bad lot !' he continues ; 'and if I had known the devilry she would be up to, she should never have come here at all. And as for Fitzroy L'Estrange, he ought to be thoroughly ashamed of himself.'

'He deserves a good thrashing !' observes Lord Mark ; 'and it strikes me very forcibly that if he does not look sharp and take heed to his ways of going on before it is too late, he has every chance of getting it. I should dearly love to thrash him myself,' he continues, 'only I suppose that is Geoff's business, as, unluckily, I'm no relation. I never wished to possess a relation before,' he continues plaintively.

'Well,' laughs Lord D'Eynecourt, 'I think we may safely leave the case in Geoff's hands. Sir Fitzroy will get a short shrift and a sure one, for Geoff simply worships his sister.'

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‘No wonder he does,’ answers Lord Mark. ‘Anyone would do the same. How could a man help it? And with the world to choose from, she must needs go and marry Fitzroy L’Estrange, the last man in the world she ought to have married. I know him too well. I call it a shame,’ he ends, ‘that such things should be allowed; for in my opinion, a man who treats his wife like that ought to be forced to do without her in future.’

‘What do you mean, Mark?’ asks Lord D’Eynecourt, looking somewhat bewildered, as well he may, by this plain speaking from the usually quiet Mark.

‘Simply this,’ the latter answers; ‘I think that people should be married on a lease—say seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, terminable at pleasure.’

‘Not a bad idea,’ rejoins Lord D’Eyne-

court. 'But, Mark, what about the morality of the proceeding?'

'Things by my plan,' answers Lord Mark, 'would be every whit as moral as they are now under existing circumstances. They could hardly be less so. Is marriage so perfect a state of existence that it deserves to be eternal? No—a thousand times, no!'

'I believe you are right,' says Lord D'Eynecourt; 'but I fear your idea is impossible of fulfilment.'

'Alas! so do I,' replies Lord Mark, with an air of profound melancholy. 'I only wish such were not the case; I might then probably have the chance of happiness which I shall never have now.'

'Is that it, my boy?' questions Lord D'Eynecourt most kindly. He looks upon Mark as he would upon the son Providence has not given him. The wife who was the

love of his life died a few months after their marriage, and, in his constancy to her memory, he has never married again.

‘Yes, that is it,’ answers Lord Mark simply. He knows he can trust the man he is talking to most implicitly.

‘God comfort you, Mark!’ replies Lord D’Eynecourt; ‘for you have a task before you. I know you so well, that I can plainly foresee all that you will have to endure and suffer, for you must never let Lady L’Estrange have the least suspicion of the truth, or, believe me, she would shun you as she would a pestilence.’

‘She shall never know it by act or word of mine, my dear old friend,’ says Lord Mark brokenly. ‘Don’t you feel that her happiness and honour are dearer than all the world, and that if I can contribute in the slightest degree to the one, and the keeping of the other, I shall do it as long as I

live, and count myself well paid by that knowledge, whether she knows what I feel or not ?’

‘ Yes, I do believe that, my boy,’ answers Lord D’Eynecourt ; ‘ and I am most thankful that Mollie has in you and your friendship a friendship that no woman, married or single, need ever be ashamed of, and that all women might be most justly proud of.’

‘ Thank you, Lord D’Eynecourt,’ answers Mark, ‘ for your good opinion of me. I shall always do my best to deserve it.’

‘ Go on as you have begun, and as you have consistently acted up to now,’ replies Lord D’Eynecourt, ‘ and I shall have no fault to find, and Mollie L’Estrange will have good cause to be proud of and to thank God for her friendship with Mark Champion.’

With which flattering opinion, openly expressed to his guest, the old man and the

young one re-entered the hospitable hall of Stepmead Abbey.

Meantime Fitzroy and Mollie are rapidly nearing their destination. Hardly a word has Sir Fitzroy vouchsafed to her—bad policy on his part, considering all he is aware that Mollie has been a witness to. And yet he knows his wife's sweet nature so well, that he feels quite safe, and is almost convinced in his own mind that never, in the days to come, no matter how great the provocation, will she ever allude, by thought, word, or deed, to that most disgraceful proceeding on his part.

It is a degree of forbearance that not one woman in a hundred would exercise ; indeed, to merit it would be an impossibility ; but Mollie is a rare wife, and yet this obstinate, discontented, indifferent man cannot even appreciate the blessing that God has given him. He deserves nothing

less than to lose Mollie, or to see the affection which has hitherto been his bestowed upon some more worthy object.

The fact of their necessary return to the Red Cottage is not viewed by either of them with pleasure. Sir Fitzroy must go back to his work, as he has had a short holiday, and poor Mollie is already dreading the glum looks and cross remarks which she is well aware will greet the appearance of dinner; for, no matter how perfectly it may be cooked, the contrast between a household where every penny has to be studied—where ‘chickens, and luxuries of that kind, are twice thought about,’ and their bones even are taken as much care of as if they were gold; ‘for are they not as rare as a Phoenix?’ and their visits as few and far between as angels’ visits—and Stepmead Abbey, where every dainty that can tempt the jaded appetites of the members of

society, cooked by a real 'cordon bleu,' is nightly spread in lavish array and tempting profusion, must necessarily be very great; and Mollie is not without sympathy on this point for Fitzroy, for she knows well what an absolute necessity a good luxurious dinner is to some men, particularly to one like Sir Fitzroy. The sound he liked best was, as Byron says :

‘That all-softening, overpowering knell,  
The tocsin of the soul—the dinner-bell.’

Like many another, his frame of mind was dependent upon his dinner.

‘A good digestion turneth all to health,’ says Herbert ; and this was Mollie’s happy experience. All the same, dinner-time was the hour of the twenty-four that, with good reason, she held in most cordial detestation.

A little more time, and home and Robin will be reached ; and in that thought, for the moment, all other disagreeables are



swept away, for Mollie is quite wrapped up in her small son, and, to do him justice, Sir Fitzroy is also very fond of him, though so odd is he, that he seems almost ashamed of his natural affection for the boy.

‘Oh dear!’ sighs Mollie, ‘I shall be glad when we are safe at home once more. I want to see Robin so much; it seems positive years since I did so. Shall you be pleased to see the little monkey, Fitzroy?’

‘Haven’t thought about it,’ sullenly replies Sir Fitzroy.

‘Your own child?’ says Mollie. ‘Oh, Fitzroy, I don’t think you really can mean that, he is such a dear, affectionate little fellow! I am sure, in your heart of hearts, that you will be glad to see him, only you won’t say so.’

And Mollie, receiving no answer from her husband, looks round and finds that, with his head buried in a magazine, Sir

Fitzroy is paying no attention to her—indeed, to all intents and purposes he is blissfully and completely oblivious of her very existence.

Much disgusted, Mollie relapses into silence, finding that there is nothing farther to be extracted from Sir Fitzroy's 'oyster'-like silence. Insensibly she falls into a reverie; and all the events of the last few days pass in rapid and minute review before her. In strong contrast to Sir Fitzroy's neglect and indifference stand out Lord Mark's unceasing attention to and care for her, all the time they passed together at Stepmead Abbey. Well does she recall him the first time they ever saw each other, the day of her presentation, when she had only been four months married; and now, since her hand had first touched his in friendship—a friendship which Mollie, in her loneliness, prays God to grant that she

may keep the rest of her life—how much has he not done for her ! What care he has lavished upon her—what visions of better days to come has he not held out before her aching eyes ! Indeed, he is a friend no woman need blush to own—such a one, rare indeed, as no husband can object to for his wife.

But this train of thought will not do, thinks Mollie ; it is too pleasant, too dangerous. So she collects the scattered atoms of thought that have made such a harmonious whole, and in looking at Fitzroy, and acknowledging her strict duty to him, takes a strong moral tonic, which is as unpleasant in its way, and as salutary in its effects, as such disagreeable remedies usually are.

They are fast approaching the Red Cottage : another five minutes, and the train stops at Chiselhurst Station, and a few

minutes more deposit Sir Fitzroy and Mollie in front of their own hall-door.

Bright lights gleam from the windows; and as the door is opened a flood of warmth and brightness greets them from the hall. And at the foot of the oak staircase, which leads from the hall to the floor above, stands a little figure clad in white, with bronze shoes and red socks, not brighter than his own cheeks, holding in his fat dimpled arms, with an air of solemnity befitting the occasion, an enormous purple and orange ball, so large that his tiny hands can hardly clasp it. The baby face, framed in masses of brown curls, and the lovely, serious blue eyes, all belong to Robin L'Estrange.

‘My Thing — my darling!’ exclaims Mollie, as she springs out of the carriage; and rushing towards the little fellow, she clasps him in her arms, and kisses neck, lips, arms, and so once again finds

comfort in her child's love and beauty, for he is a very beautiful child.

Robin is one of the loveliest, most winning specimens of baby beauty ever produced by Nature out of her great workshop, where everything comes from, whether good or evil. He is the image of his mother, and, at the same time, is extremely like Sir Fitzroy. In point of fact, he inherits the beauty and good features of both his father and mother ; and if the character of the child is as good as his face is fair, there will be nothing wanting that the most fastidious person could possibly desire. A very beautiful picture the two make—Mollie in her travelling dress, flushed with delight at holding the child in her arms again, and Robin, with his face lovingly pressed against hers as she holds him in her arms, and his hands tightly holding his cherished ball.

Oh, happy Mollie ! though you know it

not now, while God has given you, and has permitted you to retain, the inestimable blessing of a little soft bit of humanity that is your own, your very own child, with all its pretty ways, its need for your care—and what care is there like a mother's?—while you have the next greatest boon in the world, the friendship of a man like Mark Champion, and the love of the Patriarch and Geoffrey, never count yourself desolate; thank God every day and hour of your life that these blessings are yours; and while they are left to you, never say you are unhappy, because that ought not to be the case. When you have given up your loved ones to the good God who gave them to you, then in the present you may be desolate, but in heaven you will be rich indeed for ever.



## CHAPTER VIII:

### TROUBLESOME DAYS.

‘Do anything but love ; or if thou lovest,  
And art a woman, hide thy heart from him  
Whom thou dost worship. Never let him know  
How dear he is ; flit like a bird before him,  
Lead him from tree to tree, from flower to flower,  
But be not won, or thou wilt, like that bird  
When caught and caged, be left to pine neglected,  
And perish in forgetfulness.’

L. E. LONDON.

For some weeks things went on at the Red Cottage much in their usual way. Fitzroy went backwards and forwards to London, often now remaining until the last train, and only getting home in time to go crossly to bed.

For a long time Mollie never wondered

where he went. She might easily have guessed, had she paused to consider. Also, Sir Fitzroy would have told her, had she asked him, for it was a perfect matter of indifference to him whether she knew where he went or not.

In the matter of money, things for them were looking blacker and blacker; there seemed nothing but breakers ahead. Look which way she would, there was certainly, humanly speaking, not much prospect of brightness for Mollie. Her life was made up of self-denial, self-repression, and untiring work for others. No doubt, in one sense, it was a good life for her; its very loneliness taught her dependence upon herself, thought for others, unselfishness—in short, many other things that perhaps she would never otherwise have known.

A luxurious life generally tends to care for self only, to one thought, the gratifica-



tion of our individual tastes and desires, whereas such a life as Mollie's was now, so different in every respect from the old happy days at Earlston, could hardly fail to call into active being the good in a character such as hers, which might, perhaps, otherwise have lain dormant for ever.

Some characters need these trials ; and, rightly taken, there is no doubt that they become inestimable blessings. How many would continue in a dull, dim-sighted state were it not for the spur of poverty and trouble !

‘ They say that blessings wait on virtuous deeds,’ says Mollie to Clifford one morning. ‘ Do you believe that ?’

‘ Yes, my lady, indeed I do !’ answers Clifford.

‘ Well,’ says Mollie, ‘ trying to do virtuous deeds as far as possible is all some of

us have to console us here below, and we might have worse consolations than that.'

And Mollie, singing away—for bad times have not yet, at any rate, taken away her spirits—proceeds to a task dear to her, that of seeing that all her things are in their proper places in her drawing-room.

Mollie is the most orderly, tidy person in the world; where she takes a thing from, there she returns it. This quality, so much in her favour, is an essential of her nature and character, which would drive some people nearly crazy, but one which, in a small household, as in Mollie's case, saves no end of trouble, and, as Clifford always says, 'materially helps her.'

This done, Robin has to be petted and amused until the time of his noonday nap, from which later on he will wake, lovely and rosy, like a 'giant refreshed,' with relics of divine sleep still showing in his half-

awake eyes. Then comes luncheon, then a walk, then letters, and the rest of the day is filled up with employment of all sorts, particularly anything that can turn an honest penny.

Coleridge says, 'The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions : the little soon-forgotten charities of a kiss, a smile, a kind look, a heartfelt compliment in the disguise of playful raillery, and the countless infinitesimals of pleasurable thought and genial feeling.'

None of these fall to Mollie's lot ; Sir Fitzroy never wasted his time upon kisses—at least, as far as our Mollie was concerned—and as for smiles, kind looks, and words, they were a stock-in-trade that he was not lavish of.

He was one of those men, of whom there are numbers—and God help the women whom they elect to marry, for they are

deserving of the keenest pity and sympathy—who think, once a woman has become their property by marriage, that all the tenderness and care, all the kind speeches and soft nothings, all the caresses and kisses—which, in nine cases out of ten, are so precious, and which go to make the lover so infinitely preferable to the husband—may be dropped, like an old garment that is worn out and done with; set aside like a thing of the past, that has been necessary and useful to you, but which is no longer, once your own, of value or use in your eyes. It is a sad, but very common state of things.

It could not fail that, with every natural feeling of love laughed at and repressed, Mollie and Sir Fitzroy should be drifting slowly but surely apart; and since the advent of Circe Dysart upon their domestic horizon, the breach was widening sensibly,

nay, rapidly. A very little more, and it would assume such proportions that it would sweep all before it, and then God help Mollie !

Her life was an entirely lonely one : her days filled by hard work—unceasing work, and her nights made up of horrors. For—

‘ In the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear !’

and to the truth of Shakespeare’s opinion poor Mollie could fully testify.

Oh, the days without happiness, the nights full of despair, which Mollie suffered now ! At night everything seemed ten times harder to bear than ever ; all her trials and worries rose up before her like an army of soldiers. She would lie awake for hours, while Sir Fitzroy slept the ‘ sleep of the just,’ trembling in every limb at the sounds she thought she heard, the agony of her own thoughts, and the indescribable

nervousness and dread of something about to happen which terrified and oppressed her more often than not, and which made her look, after a night of mental agony such as this, years older, and as if she had passed through some acute and most severe illness. And then at last, feeling it impossible to bear the awful silence and darkness any longer by herself, in very fear that she would go crazy, Mollie would jump up, hastily put on a dressing-gown, and, white and trembling, would go into Clifford's room and wake her to tell her all her troubles ; and, perhaps after hours, when Clifford had soothed and talked to her, she would return to her bed, but never close her eyes until the first streak of dawn heralded to the sleeping world the advent of hope and a new day.

The winter nights were Mollie's despair and what she would have done had she not

had Clifford to speak to Mollie knew not. No; it is certain that her lot in life was the thorny way of self-denial and renunciation, not the primrose path of love and dalliance. In such nights and days as this was Mollie's life now passed. Little indeed did she think, when she married Sir Fitzroy, of the future in store for her—she, who had always been petted and made much of by all her family—the Patriarch, and Geoffrey in particular—to now be destined to endure such an existence as this. But it is true that '*Les jours se suivent mais ne se ressemblent pas*;' and this Mollie knew to her cost. She had married Sir Fitzroy, and she would never forget that fact.

One evening Sir Fitzroy came home rather earlier than usual.

'I have asked Geoff and Mark Champion to come here in a fortnight,' said he, 'so see that everything is ready for them.'

‘Very well, dear,’ answered Mollie ; she was so pleased at the idea of seeing Geoffrey and—shall we confess it?—Lord Mark also, that she felt as if she could dance for joy. ‘Are you going to London to-morrow, Fitzroy?’ she continued.

‘Of course I am,’ rejoined her amiable better half; ‘don’t I always go every day of my life? What do you ask such a senseless question for? What in the world will you ask next?’

‘I only ask,’ answers Mollie quietly, ‘because I did so hope that for once you would take a holiday.’

‘I cannot afford to take holidays,’ answers Sir Fitzroy; ‘and,’ he continues, industriously filling his pipe, and suddenly taking an all-absorbing interest in something the other end of the room, ‘I am going to dine in London to-morrow, and I shall not be back until the last train.’



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‘Where do you dine?’ asks Mollie.

‘I dine out; that is enough,’ answers Sir Fitzroy.

‘No, it is not enough!’ answers Mollie;  
‘kindly answer my question.’

‘I shall not!’ answers Sir Fitzroy;  
‘suffice it that I dine out.’

And with that this sweet man relapses into smoke and the evening paper.

Mollie looks at him with an expression on her face that is first cousin to, if not actual, disgust, and she walks slowly towards the door.

‘You might have answered me civilly!’ says she, as she opens the door; ‘and you need not have made a mystery out of the simple fact of an engagement to dinner, especially as I am well aware that, as usual, you will dine with Mrs. Dysart!’

This is only a conjecture on Mollie’s part, and she never knows what prompts

her to say it, but she has an instinctive feeling that her guess is a correct one—and so it proves.

‘What the —— do you mean,’ asks Sir Fitzroy, ‘by saying that?’

‘Simply this,’ replies Mollie—‘that I am quite aware of how you pass your time, and who you neglect me for. You see, I was right in what I said; do as you please, but be kind enough not to swear at me;’ and with her great eyes sparkling ominously, and her figure drawn up to its full height, Mollie turns the handle of the door and walks majestically from the room, leaving Sir Fitzroy crestfallen, and for once in his life speechless.

Mollie goes to her room, and kneeling by her bed, buries her face in the clothes, and cries as if her very heart would break. For some time she sobs on and on, until at last she becomes perfectly exhausted. Her

sobs get fainter and fainter ; and then, worn out by the tempest of her grief, the seldom-indulged-in luxury of a good cry, she falls asleep with her bright head prone on her arms, and still in a kneeling position.

A long time passes away. Like a wounded deer, Mollie has fled away and hidden herself. At dressing-time Clifford goes to light the gas and nearly falls over something in the dark.

‘ Gracious me ! what is that ? ’ exclaims Clifford, startled beyond words.

Then, having struck a light, she perceives, to her horror, that it is Mollie.

‘ My lady ! ’ says Clifford, gently laying her hand upon Mollie’s shoulder—‘ my lady, it is dressing-time ; please wake up ! ’

At last Mollie opens her eyes, and in a bewildered way looks round her. Clifford helps her to get up, for she is quite stiff

from kneeling. And then over Mollie sweeps a flood of remembrance, and she recalls how she went to sleep from sheer exhaustion from crying.

Clifford sees that something is wrong, but discreetly forbears to ask any questions, well knowing that if Mollie has anything to tell her she will do so without her asking. She hates being bothered with questions. She sees Mollie has been crying, and she has a pretty accurate guess of the state of things. Mollie is quite overworked, and in that state from depression and loneliness that the least thing said or done would cause a burst of tears, so Clifford talks upon indifferent subjects.

After a time Mollie goes down to dinner ; and being what she is, she exerts herself more than ever to talk to and be pleasant to her husband ; and he, for once in his life, has the grace to be ashamed of himself,

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and to be more like the Fitzroy of old days, knowing that if Mollie knew one half his iniquities she would probably leave him. So dinner and the evening pass off without storms, indeed in peace, almost happiness.



## CHAPTER IX.

MAL DIRE DE SON PROCHAIN ! C'EST UNE  
VRAIE FÊTE.

‘Take heed, lest by your heat you burn yourselves.’  
*Henry VI., Part 2.*

‘Use every man after his desert, and who should ‘scape  
whipping ?’  
*Hamlet.*

THE following morning Sir Fitzroy wended his way as usual to London, and without let or hindrance duly arrived at the ‘great city,’ as Johnson aptly describes it :—

‘London, the needy villain’s general home,  
The common sewer of Paris and of Rome,  
With eager thirst, by folly or by fate,  
Sucks in the dregs of each corrupted state ;’

and equally, in due course, he arrived at the

end of his day's work, as the clock struck 7.45, at the door of Circe Dysart's pretty house in Cromwell Road.

The door was opened to him promptly—evidently the servants were well accustomed to his presence there, and apparently viewed it as a matter of course.

Sir Fitzroy walked quickly up the staircase, carpeted as it was with a soft covering so thick that footsteps fell noiselessly upon it, and entered unannounced into the room in which Circe had been impatiently awaiting his arrival.

The room was a picture ; for whatever good taste Circe's proceedings generally might lack, even her worst enemy—and she had many inveterate ones, of the kind that a woman such as she was would be sure to have—could not fail to acknowledge the fact that, in her own room and house, her taste was simply perfection. Hence every-

thing was good, everything was old ; and as the hostess was very, very rich, and she was childless, there was no reason why any fancy of hers in reason should not be gratified ; and out of reason, well ! she found some one more foolish and reckless than herself, difficult task though that was, to execute her behests.

The room in which she received Sir Fitzroy was lovely. The walls were panels filled with Gainsboroughs, Romneys, and Sir Joshuas, let into old carved oak frames ; the dado was of ebony inlaid with silver, and the ceiling had in the four corners pictures by Sir Joshua, and in the centre a group of flowers most exquisitely executed. The chairs were all of carved oak, the seats being of Gobelin tapestry, and the secretaire and cabinets were beautifully painted. With all that was old, there was still an indescribable air of comfort about the room.



Circe looked lovely enough to make any man temporarily lose possession of his senses. Her dress of pale yellow satin, covered with Spanish lace, caught here and there with knots of pale pink roses, on each of which a jet butterfly with wings, so naturally made that they quivered with every movement of the wearer, appeared to have alighted, suited her dark hair and lovely face and eyes most perfectly.

She came forward with outstretched hands to meet Sir Fitzroy, and the lace which half hid her white skin rose and fell with the emotion she experienced ; for it had come to this—that with all the passion and affection such a nature as hers was capable of, she had at last found what it was to care. With the wild love of an untamed tigress she loved Sir Fitzroy, and he was quite infatuated about her. Well was she named Circe. She had bound him hand

and foot in chains that he would find it hard—nay, almost impossible—to break; and up to now, at any rate, he had no wish to take off the pleasant yoke which bound him safe and sure in the meshes of the net ‘the Siren’ had spread for his willing feet.

‘How late you are,’ answers Circe; ‘I thought you were never coming.’

‘Only 7.45,’ answers Sir Fitzroy; ‘your clock must be too fast;’ and as he speaks Sir Fitzroy smiles fondly on the beautiful woman whose face is so near his own.

Circe was one of those women who seem to have a special attraction for, and gift of attracting, married men. Certainly she had this power over Sir Fitzroy.

‘Come to dinner,’ says Circe; ‘the soup will be cold—an unpardonable offence in your sight, sir,’ she continues, ‘even when

your unpunctuality has been the cause of this fault.'

'One kiss !' whispers Fitzroy.

Circe raises her face to his, and he kisses her lips passionately. And then more soberly she takes his arm, and together they go down to dinner.

This room is as lovely as the drawing-room, with the difference of stamped Spanish leather and Chippendale ; and the dinner is above fault-finding. In all respects it is a contrast to the Red Cottage ; but Mollie is made to suffer for the riches and luck of her neighbours, and the great poverty on their own side, which she is powerless to help, and which, were it not for her constant work and determination to earn money, she would be powerless even to alleviate.

It is a shame, in every sense of the word, that Mollie should suffer so heavily for that which she has no control over ; but such a

state of things is very often the case. She is not one of those who complain of their domestic troubles to others.

As Sir Villiers truly says, 'Mollie is very sensitive ; she does not like proclaiming her woes to the outside public.' Fitzroy was her first love—the man to whom she has sacrificed the best years of her life ; and, above all, he is the father of her child—of her beloved Robin. Mollie will never forget that fact, though to know how very much you are pitied by your friends and acquaintances, as she knows she is, is a state of things the bitterness of which it is impossible to realize, but which is gall and wormwood to a proud spirit like Mollie's.

Dinner progresses satisfactorily, and after it Circe and Sir Fitzroy return to the drawing-room.

The evenings are chilly ; a bright fire burns in the grate, and the pleasant light

of numbers of wax candles, skilfully shaded, sheds a soft gleam over everything. A low seat, well covered with soft cushions, is drawn up on one side of the fireplace, and on this Circe seats herself. Sir Fitzroy lights a cigar, and sits down beside her.

Circe seems sunk in a kind of dreamy languor, though ever and anon her eyes flash out a look that is the reverse of restful. For some time Sir Fitzroy smokes in silence, watching Circe all the time with eyes that tell their own tale. Then, his cigar ended, he throws away the stump, and putting his arm round Circe, draws her quietly into his arms.

‘My darling—my queen!’ murmurs Sir Fitzroy, ‘are you happy now?’

‘Yes,’ replies Circe in a whisper. ‘You do love me really, do you not?’ she continues eagerly.

‘Better than my life,’ replies Sir Fitzroy fondly.

And it is true. Sir Fitzroy believed he cared for Mollie; but she is too good for him, too pure, too quiet. His is a nature that wants passion and change; and once Mollie was his wife, her power over him was gone. Sad for her that such is the case, but these instances are only too common.

Seconds pass into minutes, and minutes into hours, and still these two sit there, apparently finding it impossible to say good-night. There is no sound in the room, save of soft loving words.

What would not Mollie have given to listen to, in a year, the words of endearment which fell from Sir Fitzroy’s lips in an hour now! He was eloquent enough when with Circe; silence was Mollie’s portion.

‘Why didn’t I meet you years ago?’

laments Sir Fitzroy ; ‘ how happy we might have been !’

‘ Yes, indeed,’ says Circe ; ‘ and now, my darling, you are married to that cold, unsympathetic woman who does not appreciate you in the very least, does not understand you either. What Mark Champion can see to admire in your wife I cannot imagine. I wonder if she is as cold to him as she is to you, my poor dear ?’ and Circe passes her hand over Sir Fitzroy’s hair lovingly, looking in his eyes with a provoking glance.

‘ She is cold to me, isn’t she ?’ asks this model husband. ‘ I am sure I am kindness itself to her, but she never did understand me ; now you, my pet, are quite different. The fact is,’ he continues confidentially, ‘ I made a fool of myself, there is no doubt about it, and bitterly I have regretted it ever since ; and since I knew you, Circe,

more than ever. I think you have bewitched me.'

'Have I?' answers Circe fondly. 'I hope so,' she continues, 'for I cannot stand seeing you so badly treated ; my love shall make up to you for it all.'

'It has, and it shall,' replies Sir Fitzroy, with a look from his eyes that tells plainly of the mad infatuation which has him so completely in its thralls.

So does Circe insert the thin edge of the wedge which in a very short time 'will make the music mute' of Mollie's life, and by skilfully abusing her to Sir Fitzroy, make him believe that which he really wishes to be the case, that she does not care for him, and treats him badly.

'I must go,' at last says Sir Fitzroy ; 'until to-morrow, my own ;' and with Circe's kisses still fresh on his lips, Sir Fitzroy drives away to the train, and so returns to



the wife who has spent her evening so differently, all alone, as she always is, and working hard, as usual, to earn the money he ought to supply her with.

It is for such women as Circe Dysart, with their alluring loveliness and their uncontrolled passions, miscalled love, that the Mollie L'Estranges of this world are left in sadness and sorrow and inexpressible loneliness.



## CHAPTER X.

### A 'PET' DAY.

'Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître,  
Il l'est, le fut, on le doit être.'

VOLTAIRE.

'They also serve who only stand and wait.'

MILTON.

It is the day when Geoffrey and Lord Mark are expected at the Red Cottage. Everything is in readiness for their reception, and Mollie is in a state of intense delight and excitement. Even Sir Fitzroy is more amiable than usual; for two more people will, by their presence, put a welcome end—as far as he is concerned—to the

*tête-à-tête* he and Mollie have enjoyed ever since their return from Stepmead Abbey.

‘ Will that do, Clifford, do you think ? ’ asks Mollie anxiously, as she ties up a spray of jasmine and a rose—this latter verily the ‘ last rose of summer ’—and places them in an old china vase on Geoffrey’s table, ready for him to put into his coat for dinner.

Mollie stands surveying her work, and waiting for Clifford’s answer as if the fate of nations depended upon it ; and in point of fact, the subject is far more important to our Mollie, for what does all else matter compared with anything that affects Geoffrey’s comfort or well-being ?

‘ Beautifully, my lady ! ’ answers Clifford ; ‘ you always had a talent for tying up flowers prettily. ’

‘ That is just what Geoff says, ’ answers Mollie delightedly. ‘ You think he will be pleased with them ? ’

‘I am sure of it,’ replies Clifford.  
‘There is the carriage driving up,’ she adds.

Mollie has seen it even before she did ; and by this time she has flown downstairs, and flinging her arms round Geoffrey’s neck, almost smothers him with kisses.

‘Gently—gently !’ exclaims Geoffrey, when at last he can find his voice again ; ‘if you begin like this, Mollie, I shall be dead before morning !’

‘Haven’t you a word for me, Lady L’Estrange ?’ asks Lord Mark, smiling.

‘Oh, I quite forgot all about you !’ says Mollie, holding out her hand ; ‘but I am very glad to see you.’

‘We will forgive the beginning of your speech,’ says Geoffrey, ‘in consideration of the latter part of it. The first part shows a lamentable parade of honesty, a quality

which, by the way, my dear Mollie, has gone entirely out of fashion. It is what the shopkeepers would term "old-fashioned," "out of date," "we don't keep it in stock," "we have no demand for it."

'Sure enough,' says Mollie, laughing; 'but you remember, please, that my name is Honesty—you gave it me yourself.'

'So I did,' says Geoffrey; 'how could I have been so foolish?'

'Not foolish at all,' retorts Mollie; 'on the contrary, for once in your life you showed an amount of future cleverness that, from the simple fact of its being so very unusual, assumed alarming and exciting proportions.'

'Well, my beloved,' observes Geoffrey placidly, 'what's done cannot be undone; or, to put it tersely, "what can't be cured must be endured," therefore to the end of our days we must put up with the painful

infliction of one honest woman in the world, namely, Mollie, Lady L'Estrange. Here ought to be general excitement and flourish of trumpets, blown by those who have, in an altogether unprecedented and wholly unwarrantable manner, taken permanent leave of the small amount of senses with which it has pleased Providence to endow them. Do you follow me, Mollie ?' he asks.

'Certainly not,' laughs Mollie.

'No more do I,' chuckles Geoffrey ; 'so there's an end of the subject. Fitzroy,' Geoffrey goes on, catching sight at this instant of his brother-in-law and host, 'how are you, old fellow ?'

'Pretty well,' answers Sir Fitzroy, in, for him, marvellously agreeable tones ; 'how are you, Mark ?' he adds.

'None the better for seeing you,' whispers Geoffrey the incorrigible, in a stage whisper.

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‘Hush!’ implores Mollie, ‘or Fitzroy will hear you, and then there will be a row. He would never forgive you; and you and Lord Mark would only shine upon our horizon to vanish into thin air, for your stay here would be short, and by no means sweet. Will you try and behave yourself, Geoff?’ Mollie continues, in agonized tones, ‘and not quarrel with Fitzroy? He is disposed to be amiable, and I have been looking forward so much to having you and Lord Mark here. Just think what it has been to sit opposite to Fitzroy every night—when he has not dined in London—to make conversation for him, to amuse him—a regular case of *toujours perdrix*, or Fitzroy, which is the same thing. No one can say what it has been: to keep my better half in a good temper for all this time has proved a task that even Hercules would have

declined. Imagine my shoulders carrying such a burden.'

'Indeed, I can do nothing of the sort,' says Geoffrey, laughing at Mollie's distressed expression; 'my imagination, always of a most limited description, entirely declines such a high flight, as comprehending the task of Fitzroy's amusement would be.'

'Well, pity me, anyhow!' pleads Mollie; 'and do your best to help me to avoid disturbances. I shall sit on tenter-hooks all the time you are here.'

'On what?' asks Geoffrey innocently. 'Is that a new kind of—— But never mind,' he ends resignedly.

'You are too bad, Geoffrey, you really are,' says poor Mollie, quite rosy red with confusion, for fear Lord Mark should have overheard Geoffrey's latest politeness. 'You will have something happen to you if you go on like this,' she continues, shaking



her head wisely, 'and I will tell you what that will be.'

'No doubt you mean,' says Geoffrey, with the air of an unappreciated and resigned martyr, a kind of 'too good for this world' sort of expression, 'that I shall be translated to another and a better world—there is no doubt, is there, Mollie, that my many virtues will merit this future?—that I shall be cut off in the flower of my decided youth and my undoubted beauty. Look at me, Mollie darling; am I not quite too utterly, too——'

'Indeed you are!' laughs Mollie. 'It is a mercy I have only one brother such as you are; but your early demise is not what I meant. What I meant is, that if you behave badly, I shall spend my last shilling in sending a telegram to your cousin and mine, Mrs. Keene Standish—there is just time to do it—and requesting

her to adjourn her visit here for the next ten years—at any rate, until I see some dependable signs of improvement in you. I think that will reduce Geoff to order,’ murmurs Mollie to Lord Mark ; ‘ what do you say ?’

‘ Undoubtedly !’ replies Lord Mark, smiling.

‘ Oh, you old darling !’ exclaims Geoffrey, hugging Mollie until, in her turn, she begs for mercy. ‘ Why didn’t you say sooner that Vivienne was coming ?’

‘ Because,’ gasps Mollie, as well as she can, ‘ like a good general, I keep my best regiment in reserve. It wanted something powerful to call you to order, my dear ! But I think my slight mention of Vivienne will do that ;’ and Mollie nods her head at Geoffrey with a sagacious and most triumphant air.

‘ Indeed it will,’ answers Geoffrey. ‘ I

will be as good as gold—that is to say, gold that one has plenty of—of one's very own. Other people's gold is nasty dross, isn't it, my sweet? I will sit here quietly until Vivienne appears;' and down sits this quaint member of society on the comfortable drawing-room sofa.

He makes himself quite at home among the soft cushions; then he raises his eyes to the ceiling, and begins twiddling his thumbs with an angelic look on his mischievous face. Mollie and Mark laugh heartily at him—who could help it?—he looks so absurd.

'Faites-vous toujours cela, monsieur?' inquires Mollie, pointing to his industrious thumbs.

'Non, madame,' responds Geoffrey, with his most beatific expression; 'quelquefois je fais ceci;' and Geoffrey reverses the position of his thumbs.

‘There’s nothing to be done with you,’ says Mollie, in despair; ‘my sole hope is in Vivienne.’

‘And so is mine,’ truly replies Geoffrey, closing his eyes with an air of resignation infinitely touching.

At this moment, that herald of bores, or the reverse, namely, pleasant visitors—the door-bell—rings violently. Up jumps Geoffrey, and tears out of the room, followed more decorously by Mollie and Lord Mark.

Vivienne’s advent has taken place. She is standing in the hall, cool and calm, and very bewitching in her travelling dress, when Mollie and Lord Mark arrive upon the scene of action. Very tender is the greeting between Vivienne and Mollie, for these two have a very real and true affection for each other, that increases as the years go by; for Vivienne is not only her

cousin, but the only woman-friend Mollie has ever had, or ever cared to have.

This is Vivienne's first visit to the Red Cottage. Lord Mark likes her very sincerely, so the greeting between them is very cordial. And as for Geoffrey, to look at the delight depicted upon his countenance, one would imagine that he had not seen his cousin for years—which is very far off the truth, as their last meeting took place at dinner the night before; therefore twenty-three hours, twenty-five minutes and three quarters exactly have elapsed since their last greeting.

‘Do you think you will know me again, Geoff?’ amiably inquires Vivienne; ‘you have stared at me for the last ten minutes in the most unblushing manner, as if I had the small-pox, or a crooked nose, or a squint in one or both eyes—at any rate, as if there was something difficult to re-

collect in my pleasing face; don't you know it is very rude to stare at a person ?'

'I never had any manners,' mildly interposes Geoffrey; 'so what can you expect ?'

'You are quite right for once in your misspent life,' responds Vivienne severely. 'The want of that virtue in your character has always been a source of regret to me; and I am much afraid I shall go down to my honoured grave accompanied by that sad regret.'

'I am also possessed with a warning that you will,' says Geoffrey; 'at any rate, it will be a companion for you—more than most people have. Don't be unkind, Vivienne,' he continues; 'I do so want to have a pleasant visit.'

At the pleading voice, Vivienne is obliged to give in and forgive the offender.

'Come and dress,' says Mollie; 'for if

we keep Fitzroy waiting for dinner, the consequences will be awful ;' so they depart to their several rooms.

Dinner passes off in the most splendid fashion. They all exert themselves to be agreeable to Fitzroy, and actually succeed in eliciting a series of remarks from him, and in causing several sweet smiles to flit across his countenance. Dessert is over, and the two ladies are about to return to the drawing-room.

Geoffrey is in the wildest spirits—not even Vivienne's presence has any effect upon him. He keeps them all in roars of laughter by his ridiculous speeches and merry sallies :

'Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,  
Sermons and soda-water the day after,'

sings our incorrigible.

Sir Fitzroy looks horrified, and Lord Mark, Mollie, and Vivienne only laugh,

Geoffrey looks so truly absurd as he gives vent to this risky speech and sentiment.

‘Mollie,’ whispers Vivienne, ‘Geoff is doing it on purpose. For heaven’s sake let us beat a retreat while he is still in the possession of whole bones!’

‘A most extraordinary song!’ grunts Sir Fitzroy.

‘Do you think so?’ responds Geoffrey. ‘I thought, Fitzroy, that you would have said, “Them’s my sentiments.”’

‘Certainly not,’ responds Sir Fitzroy, with extreme dignity; and he rises from the table, and goes to open the door for Mollie and Vivienne to depart.

Then wicked Geoffrey enacts the part of the sacristan, who

‘Said no word to indicate a doubt,  
But he put his thumb unto his nose, and spread his  
fingers out.’



Mollie, Lord Mark, and Vivienne view his last insanity with horror depicted upon their countenances, the while they are choking with suppressed laughter, cramming their pocket-handkerchiefs into their mouths to smother their chuckles of delight.

What would happen if Sir Fitzroy happened to turn round and see them? 'Après cela la deluge,' no other ending would be theirs. Therefore, justly holding the opinion that 'prudence is the better part of valour,' and thanking Providence that Sir Fitzroy is not an argus-pheasant, —with eyes we will not even hint where— while there is yet time our two delinquents beat a hasty and most undignified retreat, retiring in the intensest disorder of mind and ideas, leaving Lord Mark and Geoffrey to conciliate Sir Fitzroy's ideas of propriety and soothe his ruffled feathers as best they may.

Geoffrey, sweet youth, kisses his hand to Mollie and Vivienne as they disappear; and with a bland smile, replete with virtue, and an air of absolute innocence truly gratifying to see, helps himself to a bumper of claret, and utterly ignoring Sir Fitzroy's glum looks, and his own late performances, draws his chair up to Sir Fitzroy's side, and disposes himself to be amiable to his host: and to draw him into conversation, whether he will or no, without 'with your leave' or 'by your leave.'

Sir Fitzroy is obliged to give in. It is no use gainsaying Geoffrey; he has a way with him that will not be denied, that utterly declines taking 'no' for an answer. And, indeed, few people seem inclined to resent anything Geoffrey does, or to say 'no' to any request of his; he is so dear and kind, so true and amiable, and so quaint in his general behaviour.

‘Oh!’ gasps Mollie, when Geoffrey appears, ‘how could you, Geoff; and after all your promises, too?’

‘Capital thing for Fitzroy, my love,’ replies Geoffrey; ‘rouses him out of himself, and really did him untold, but salutary good. I wanted to shock him, and I flatter myself I succeeded’—this with an air of extreme goodness—‘and though not generally vain—indeed, I may say that no one is less so, considering my extreme cleverness and beauty—yet I may say I scored one and paid off a few old debts.’

And over Geoffrey’s countenance spreads a light that is downright refreshing to see. It is so entirely amiable, that even the person most on the look-out for fault-finding, and a screw loose somewhere, cannot find it in his heart to scold the delinquent, or take umbrage at his evidently virtuous actions and intentions.

‘It is all very well for you, Geoff,’ says Vivienne, with a sigh of most profound relief for the trouble she has escaped; ‘but just carry your memory back so far as the moment when, with a royal disregard for consequences, a magnificent contempt for the future, you prepared to run the gauntlet of Fitzroy’s—I must say—most excusable anger if he had seen you. What, may I inquire, should you have done in the event of such a catastrophe?’

‘Borne it with equanimity,’ responds Geoffrey most mildly, ‘and with the courage worthy of a far better cause. In point of fact, my dear Mollie, I should have—yes, undoubtedly I positively should have—risen to the occasion, and if Fitzroy had in a weak moment ventured to interfere with me in ever so slight a degree, I should have been obliged, sincerely as I should have regretted it, to tell him, in straight, forcible,

and most unmistakable language, to hold his tongue !'

'All very well,' answers Mollie, with conviction ; 'but in this case Fitzroy would have been right—"every Englishman's house is his castle," and you have no right to be rude to a man in his own house, or, in point of fact, in anyone else's ; if you do such things, you must expect to abide by them !'

Thus it will be seen that though their honeymoon was of such old date that both had hardly even a recollection of it, yet that loyal Mollie—whatever her own feelings might be—would not suffer anyone, no matter who, to say or hint at anything, no matter how slight, in her husband's disfavour.

Oh, true wives ! you deserve a better fate, than the sad, longing, unsatisfied one you so often—nay, almost always—get !

‘All right, Mollie,’ continues Geoffrey, ‘I really will be more careful in future—you shan’t have to complain of me again while I am here ; and when I depart, my conduct in the interim will have been so perfect that you will be positively moved to feelings of keen regret as you watch my departing form, seen through a cloud of dust.’

‘I am always miserable away from you, Geoff,’ whispers Mollie, quite mollified at Geoffrey’s unwonted steadiness.

So the threatening of active hostilities passes away, and for the rest of the evening there is not even a threatening of war.

Geoffrey made himself so pleasant to Sir Fitzroy, after his rudeness in the dining-room, that Sir Fitzroy was obliged to receive the olive-branch tardily held out for his acceptance.

‘Let us have some music,’ says Geoffrey ; ‘we are all getting melancholy. Being

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good,' he observes to Vivienne, in a stage whisper, 'is so unusual with me, that it does not suit me at all; it is like eating goose and lobster for dinner—it sets heavy, and produces a decided tendency to a sound called by the vulgar “snoring.” Now, we call it “a gentle music” which testifies to our relations and friends that we are still in the land of the living. I shall snore in five minutes, I know I shall; and I feel certain that Fitzroy likes a monopoly of that accomplishment, and would view such a proceeding on my part as a direct case of poaching upon his preserves. Cure me from that awful fate, Mollie; I shudder to contemplate the ghastly results;' and Geoffrey gives a shiver as if a jug of cold water was being unexpectedly poured down his back, and a regiment of geese, as fat as they are after an intimate acquaintance with Doncaster common previous to the

29th of September, were making an early acquaintance with his last resting-place.

‘An army of geese have walked over my grave,’ observes Geoffrey; ‘did you see how I shivered, Mollie?’

‘Oh, pray don’t say such things, Geoff!’ pleads Mollie. ‘Don’t jest on such a subject; you give me an uncanny feeling all over me! Come along,’ Mollie continues; ‘let’s have a song!’

Geoffrey and Vivienne sit down to the piano, and give them a selection from all the most popular airs and dance-music of the day; and then Mark sings, and afterwards Mollie.

Sir Fitzroy listens amiably for some time, and finally betakes himself off into a sweet slumber.

‘Go and win some gloves, Mollie,’ says Geoffrey, pointing to Fitzroy.

‘No, thank you,’ answers Mollie. ‘I



shall wait until you are asleep, and then see if I can win any.'

The hours are speeding fast away—soon sleep will claim them all for her own ; but on and on they sing—it seems as if they were all loath to break the spell which seems to hold them all. And no wonder ; for where Vivienne is, there is happiness for Geoffrey, and in Mollie's society, it is sure that Lord Mark feels the greatest joy his life ever knows. But they must say good-night.

'God bless you, my darling !' says Geoffrey, holding Mollie lovingly in his arms. 'And God bless you, Vivienne !' he adds.

'The same to you, fair sir,' answers Mollie. 'Good-night, Lord Mark ; sleep well.'

So they disperse. The last thing Geoffrey says is :

‘When shall we three, or rather four,  
meet again?’

‘Heaven knows!’ answers Mollie, with,  
she knows not why, a presentiment of  
evil upon her.

‘One more song, dear,’ says Geoffrey;  
and, without waiting for a reply, he sings  
that perfect one of Adelaide Proctor’s—  
‘Fidelis.’

The last thing they hear is,

‘“I shall nurse my love and keep it,  
Faithfully for you, till then.”’

That is their memory of Geoffrey.



## CHAPTER XI.

### NUIT DE BONHEUR.

‘God gives us love—something to love  
He lends us ; but when love is grown  
To ripeness, that on which it throve  
Falls off, and love is left alone.’

TENNYSON.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone—indeed, the new year was seven months old—when we next meet our *dramatis personæ* again.

Mark, Vivienne, and Geoffrey had remained at the Red Cottage nearly a fortnight ; and then they had all once more gone on their different ways, meeting at Earlston again for Christmas, which had

been, in spite of many troubles, on the whole happily passed.

Mollie and Fitzroy had left the Red Cottage, and were established—he said for economy, but Mollie called it by another name—in a small house in Kensington.

Robin was now three years and two months old, and a most engaging, lovely child, his mother's best comfort in all her worries. Clifford was still with Mollie, happily; for if it had not been for these two, humanly speaking, she would have had but little to help or comfort her—her father, Geoffrey, and Vivienne always excepted—for things had gone from bad to worse with Mollie and Fitzroy.

The net spread for Sir Fitzroy's willing feet by Circe Dysart at Stepmead Abbey the year before had proved itself to be made of such unyielding materials that

the victim was absolutely powerless to extricate himself, even if he had wished, which no one believed.

Sir Fitzroy's was one of those mad infatuations one sometimes sees ; and his folly was kept alive by Circe, who, as far as such a woman could understand the meaning of such a word, really 'cared' for Sir Fitzroy. Therefore, with the feeling returned on her part, there was but small chance of a change of affairs.

Mollie now was more than ever alone ; her sisters and their husbands had gone on a voyage round the world which would last at least three years, and Sir Villiers did not care to be always in London, though he was there a great deal.

Vivienne was with Mollie whenever it was possible, and so was Geoffrey, and very often Lord Mark, who, strange to say, had, up to then, kept upon good terms

with Sir Fitzroy, would come and dine with them, or make them dine with him, and now and again persuade them to go to a theatre with him. He was more chivalrous than ever in his care for Mollie and Robin, and the little fellow was devoted to him ; but, try to hide it from himself as he would, Lord Mark could no longer deny that the woman he respected and cared for more than anyone else in the world (though never by a word did he show his real feelings — it was only his thoughtfulness and desire to help and please Mollie that in any way showed his true sentiments) was very, very unhappy, and that though, in thought, word, and deed, Mollie was absolutely loyal to her husband, yet that her life was a terrible one of real keen suffering by night and by day. How lonely and wretched a life, no human being could ever tell ; for she was still fond

enough of Sir Fitzroy to try and hide her misery, and the way she was treated, from the eyes of the world, ever on the alert for its neighbours' shortcomings, and so pleased when these are betrayed, and are patent to their delighted eyes. Well has it been said that 'Virtuous deeds are but born to die.' Small chance certainly have they of a prolonged existence in this unkind, uncharitable nineteenth century of ours !

And so matters were, one day in July, when Geoffrey, who was quartered at Aldershot, had run up to London for a ball, and for the express purpose of seeing Mollie and Vivienne at this entertainment. Lord Mark also would be there ; so the quartette promised themselves that, if all was well, they would have a really pleasant time of it.

The ball was given by the Duchess of

Morton, a very old friend of the whole Adair family. Mollie did not go out often, as she had no carriage; but when she did, she thoroughly enjoyed herself.

The Duchess had a very large house in Cavendish Square; she was a thorough 'grande dame,' a woman of the world, very beautiful, and she possessed the kindest, most sympathising heart in the world. The Duke was Lord Mark's cousin; he was very rich, and let her do exactly as she pleased, as his only desire in life was her happiness; and as her taste in all matters was proverbial, balls at Morton House were always looked forward to with the keenest pleasure by those who had the *entrée*, and proportionately disliked and abused by those less fortunate.

The ball was progressing in the most satisfactory manner when Mollie and Vivienne entered—Mollie robed in purest white,



with the back of the dress of *moiré*, on which hops and ivy leaves were skilfully raised in seed pearls and silver; she carried in her hand a bouquet of clove carnations and tuberose, and her lovely face looked more lovely still from the delicate colour in her cheeks and the brilliant colour in her magnificent eyes as she thought of the coming pleasure. Vivienne was piquante and *ravissante*, as her French dressmaker ecstasically observed, in *gris perle*, smothered by the petals of pink roses, which, frosted with diamond powder, were scattered over it by a careless hand in lavish profusion; and in her hand was a bunch of the flowers, and she looked positively radiant.

‘You’ve been and gone and done it this time, and no mistake,’ observes Geoffrey, looking at his cousin with plainly expressed admiration. ‘As Toole says, “Let me look at you in twice. Once won’t half embrace

your charms. Have mercy upon my feelings; and, as you are great, be merciful." You are really lovely,' Geoffrey finishes, when he has caused Vivienne to make sundry turns and pirouettes and courtesies, for his especial benefit, and he gazes at her with fond and admiring eyes.

'How do you like us both?' asks Mollie amiably.

'I'm struck all of a heap!' says Geoffrey. 'It will take me weeks to get used to so much youth and loveliness.'

'This is the dress you gave me, Geoff,' continues Mollie. 'I am so glad you like it; it is so lovely. But I could never have bought it; it is far too expensive. You are a dear old boy for giving it to me.'

'So long as you are pleased, my pet,' replies Geoffrey, 'I am satisfied. I only want to give you pleasure.'

‘That you always do,’ answers Mollie. ‘Ah, what would my life be without you, Geoff? I should pray God that I might die!’ she continues passionately; ‘for then I should be with you again.’

‘Don’t worry, my darling,’ answers Geoffrey. ‘You know I love you always. Remember that always, whatever happens. Come along,’ he continues; ‘let’s go and show the heathens what dancing really means.’

Off they go, Mollie’s temporary melancholy quite cleared away by the love of Geoffrey, that dear brother who is all the world to her. Away they fly, to the joyous strains of ‘Old China,’ and highly do they enjoy themselves. And then the four adjourn to the balcony which overlooks the garden at the back of the house. There is a curve round the corner of the house, so

Mollie and Lord Mark occupy one corner, Geoffrey and Vivienne the other.

For some time there is silence between the couples. They seem exhausted by their exertions; and no wonder, for the evening is a continuation of the hottest day of a very hot summer, when living is almost too great an exertion. Geoffrey fans Vivienne while she reclines, in lazy fashion, in a luxuriously cushioned chair, which he has extricated from an adjoining room and placed there for her especial benefit.

‘Have you enjoyed your evening so far, Vivienne?’ inquires Geoffrey.

‘Yes,’ replies Vivienne softly. ‘Have you?’ she continues.

‘*Cela va sans dire, madame,*’ answers Geoffrey; ‘are you not here? Why, Vivienne,’ he goes on, almost reproachfully, ‘I thought you knew that I am only happy

when with you too well to ask such a question.'

'So I do,' replied Vivienne.

'But, all the same, it is not unpleasant to you to hear it,' puts in Geoffrey eagerly.

'Thank you for that, dear; I shall always be grateful for that speech on your part.' And he raises Vivienne's hand softly to his lips, his way of saying 'Thank you.'

'Well, you are a dear boy, that I am bound to confess,' continues Vivienne; 'and I am very glad you are here to-night.'

What possesses Vivienne to say such things she never knows; but when she looks back on the events and conversations of that night with Geoffrey, she is most thankful to her dying day that she said what she did, for it was no wrong to Norman, and it made Geoffrey so unutterably happy. Oh! if people could only foresee the consequences of their words,

whether kind or unkind, how very careful they would be in their manner of speech !

These two are so happy together, for Geoffrey has proved his affection for Vivienne in such simple, manly, unselfish fashion, that she can't choose but like and respect him. Well does he deserve both !

' God bless you, my dear !' says Geoffrey at last, looking at Vivienne with a respectful devoted look that she need never blush at having been the object of. ' I suppose we must go and find Mollie and Mark, and have one last dance before we leave, for it is getting very late.'

With a happy expression, an almost solemn peace, on their faces, they depart in search of Mollie and Lord Mark.

These two had been enjoying the beauty of the glorious evening to the full. Their hearts were too full for speech.

Although Lord Mark cared so much for

Mollie, he had guarded, and would guard his secret so well, that she had not the least notion that he had any feeling for her warmer than that of being her true and devoted friend. She was still so engrossed in trying to maintain a semblance of affection between herself and Sir Fitzroy, and, in so doing, to hoodwink the world, and deceive society as to the real state of affairs—though it did not deceive herself or Sir Fitzroy—that she had no room for other thoughts, and all her spare time was kept for Robin and Geoffrey and the Patriarch, and that hopeless struggle with poverty, ‘trying to make both ends meet.’ The impossibility of that task none knew better than Mollie did, she, who until her marriage had never lacked all things that she needed, and to whom the value of money was a problem unsolved ! That she would one day have to fathom

such a trouble had indeed been far from her thoughts ; but, as it seemed inevitable, Mollie had set herself to work to unravel it with all the determination to succeed, and to extricate herself and her husband from those awful debts and difficulties, and once more to be free, even if very poor, that such a brave, energetic, upright woman as Mollie was capable of.

She had set herself a task, and she will, if she lives, God helping her, carry it out in its most minute details to the very end, at all costs, at any sacrifice. And Mollie was not a woman to take comfort and consolation by the way ; that was not her method at all, otherwise she could have had it—as what woman cannot, no matter how old, how ugly, if she is unscrupulous and unprincipled enough to wish it, and forgetful enough to forget right for wrong in the loneliness and craving for ‘ some one to love



and to love me,' which is born with everybody? Some women are like butterflies; others are like limpets—they attach themselves to one thing or person, and they have no room in their hearts, no time in their lives, for any other affection. With Festus may they say, 'There is a love which acts to death, and through death; it is beyond the accidents of life.'

Such a woman was Mollie, though, alas for her! her love for Sir Fitzroy has met with no reward, only neglect and indifference.

'You look very tired, Lady L'Estrange,' at last says Lord Mark, when the silence is becoming oppressive.

'Yes,' replies Mollie; 'I am weary, body and mind. I quite feel for Marianne—I perfectly understand what she felt.'

'You are very young to have such bitter feelings,' says Mark.

‘Never too young, Lord Mark,’ answers Mollie, ‘to learn the sad lesson of adversity, neglect, and unhappiness.’

‘And equally,’ smiles Lord Mark, ‘never too young to learn the lesson which is the remedy.’

‘What is that?’ asks Mollie curiously.

‘The helping of others by self-denial, the care shown in return for indifference, the content in the midst of sad surroundings, the steadfast determination to win by right-doing in the face of soul-wearying trials, the unflinching because “right is right” in the centre of temptations awful to think of; these duties, and such as these, are, believe me, Lady L’Estrange, the remedy for such a case—such a life as yours. I have always thought,’ continues Lord Mark, ‘that those lines of Charles Kingsley’s—

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‘ “Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever ;  
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long,  
And so make Life, Time, and that great Forever,  
One grand, sweet song,”

were especially applicable to you. Cheer up, dear Lady L'Estrange ! it is a long lane that has no turning ; and I feel a conviction that you will not always be so grey, so dull. Take heart, and be comforted.’

‘ Oh, don’t be kind to me !’ says Mollie piteously. ‘ I am so unused to sympathy that I can’t stand it ; it unnerves me far more than indifferent words and careless actions, for I am used to both of them.’

‘ Well, let us go back and have a last valse,’ says Lord Mark, anxious to turn Mollie’s ideas into a more happy and hopeful channel.

Just as Mollie gets up to comply, Vivienne and Geoffrey turn the corner and appear upon the scene.

‘We are all evidently bound upon the same errand,’ observes Geoffrey complacently; ‘but I say, young woman,’ he goes on, ‘before we go let us settle our programme for to-morrow—I shall have to return to Aldershot the day after. What do you say to going to Hurlingham to-morrow afternoon? Our fellows are going to play a game of polo, aided and abetted by your servant to command.’

‘I hate polo,’ says Mollie; ‘nasty, dangerous game. I shan’t come!’

‘Oh, do, Mollie!’ whispers Geoffrey, ‘just to please me. The ground is in a bad state,’ he continues; ‘woe betide us if we get a fall.’

‘Pray don’t play, darling!’ implores Mollie; ‘come and spend the afternoon with me instead, and dine with me. I will ask Vivienne and Lord Mark. Fitzroy dines out, as usual; and if you will come

we will have one of our old evenings all together, with plenty of music after.'

'I shall be delighted to dine with you,' graciously answers Geoffrey, 'and shall hope to meet the present agreeable company'—this with a low bow—'but you must excuse my saying, Mollie, that a promise is a promise. I cannot break mine; it would spoil the whole match if I did, as they have no one to take my place. My promises are not of the pie-crust order, made to be broken; so, sweet Mollie, I must spend my afternoon at Hurlingham (unless it pours with rain), play my match, and dine with you afterwards.'

'I devoutly hope it will rain!' viciously exclaims Mollie.

'That is a remark unworthy of you, my beloved,' interposes Geoffrey. 'What I want to know is, will you come or not?'

'I will come,' at last assents Mollie.

‘But I do wish, Geoff, you would give up that horrid game; it always makes me nervous, and I do pity those poor ponies so much.’

‘They like it,’ says Geoffrey; ‘at least, I know Enchantress does. She is called after you and Vivienne; I give you leave to fight over which of you inspired me with such a “beautiful thing in names.” How late it is,’ continues he—‘four o’clock, I declare! If we don’t go to bed we shall be incapable of getting up in time for Hurlingham. I wonder where we shall all be at five o’clock to-morrow afternoon!’ he says musingly.

‘Who can tell?’ laughs Vivienne—‘at Hurlingham, I hope, seeing you play your best; but we may all have quarrelled and parted by then, “never to meet no more,”’ she finishes, with a mischievous twinkle in her bright eyes; ‘or we may change our

minds—it is our privilege, you know—and never come at all.'

'If I thought that,' says Geoffrey, giving her a little shake as she stands by him, looking at him with her fun-loving eyes, 'I would keep you valseing all night, and then wait at Mollie's until you had changed your garments for suitable day-attire, and carry you off to Hurlingham for the entire day.'

'We shall appear,' says Mollie; 'but positively we must go now.'

'Not without that last valse!' exclaim Geoffrey and Lord Mark together.

So they return to the ball-room and dance 'Sweethearts' from beginning to end. Then they see Mollie and Vivienne safely to their carriage, and stand on the steps watching them as they drive away.

Mollie and Vivienne look out, and their last sight, their farewell, is of Geoffrey bareheaded, kissing his hand to them, look-

ing as handsome as it is possible to look, while the first flush of the dawn of a new day begins to illuminate the sky, and envelops him as he stands in a flood of light, a mantle of beauty and glory.





## CHAPTER XII.

### JOUR DE MALHEUR.

‘ Arise ! this day shall shine  
For evermore ;  
To thee a star divine,  
On Time’s dark shore.

‘ Each of God’s soldiers bears  
A sword divine ;  
Stretch out thy trembling hands  
To-day for thine.

‘ And leaving all behind,  
Come forth, alone,  
To join the chosen band  
Around the throne.


‘ Raise up thine eyes—be strong,  
Nor cast away  
The crown that God has given  
Thy soul to-day.’

A. PROCTER : *A First Sorrow.*

OF all the splendid July days that ever  
were seen, surely this day of the Hurling-

ham polo-match was the fairest. There was not a cloud bigger than a man's hand; the sky was of the deepest, most intense blue; the air was soft and balmy, without the trying, most exhausting heat which had so especially characterized the previous twenty-four hours.

The flowers lift up their thirsty heads in vivid beauty with the hope that before night their cups would be full to overflowing with most welcome rain; the many-hued butterflies flit from one collection of floral beauty to another; the bees hum drowsily, and the midges sting energetically (they are above such minor, insignificant details as heat and thirst, except for some well-favoured specimen of humanity); the band plays with delight; the crowd increases; the coaches arrive; the pedestrians perambulate on the horses Providence has provided for them ('shank's



ponies' though they are); the riders assemble. The whole of Hurlingham is alive with hues of colour quite unknown in Eve's wardrobe; in a word, Hurlingham is at its short-lived glory; 'polo' is about to begin.

Mollie woke late the morning after the ball at Morton House. The heat and unwonted exertion had made her unusually sleepy; for, as a rule, Morpheus and Mollie were on the most quarrelsome, uncomfortable terms—in point of fact, at daggers-drawn for the largest half of the night. But this time the drowsy god had wooed her to some purpose, and some hours of sleep had been the result; but, all the same, she woke with a strange feeling of oppression and dread—a sinister feeling as of something about to happen.

Certainly there was something wrong with Mollie to-day. She dawdled away

her morning until luncheon in her bedroom, and then she came downstairs with slow and weary steps. In the dining-room she found Sir Fitzroy, grumbling because he had been kept five minutes waiting, and he wanted to be off to Circe, with whom, as usual, he was going to spend the rest of the day. He was taking a week's holiday.

‘What time are you going to start for Hurlingham?’ asked Sir Fitzroy.

Mollie had sent him word by Clifford of her plans for the day and evening.

‘Vivienne said she would call here for me at a quarter before three,’ answered Mollie; ‘but really, Fitzroy, I do not think I can go. I hate polo, and I have the most unaccountable sensation of nervousness and dread upon me, that I feel all over me, but that I cannot describe.’

And Mollie shudders as she speaks; her bright face is quite grave and wretched;

her hands are like ice, and she shakes like a person with the ague.

‘I don’t know,’ she continues, ‘what it is that makes me feel so ill and terrified—whether I dread something happening to myself, or what it is.’

‘Nonsense!’ says Sir Fitzroy sharply. ‘Don’t be fanciful, Mollie; it is nothing but sitting up so late last night and dancing, which you are not used to. You shouldn’t do it. What in the world does a married woman of your age want to dance for? Very unnecessary, I must say. However, now you are paying the penalty of your folly, and I hope you like it. You must go,’ he adds; ‘you cannot disappoint Vivienne; that is out of the question.’

‘I am sure Vivienne would not want me to go, or Geoff either,’ replies Mollie, with quivering white lips, ‘if they knew what I feel and the dread that is upon me. I

really don't see,' she adds, 'why I am not to have the least amusement even. You know very well that I do not often get the chance of a good valse, and you equally are aware that dancing is the favourite amusement of my life, particularly when Lord Mark or Geoff are my partners.'

'Especially the former,' sneers Sir Fitzroy, with his most unpleasant expression.

'Yes,' answers Mollie, nothing daunted (she is nothing if she is not honest, and sticking up for her friends, especially absent ones, is a virtue of her character), 'especially Lord Mark; he is charming, and vales better than anyone I know. But come,' she continues, seeing Sir Fitzroy's the reverse of amiable expression in the looking-glass, 'don't let's argue; it isn't worth it!'

'Well,' resumes Sir Fitzroy, 'anyhow to Hurlingham you must go if you have

finished your lunch. You had better go and get ready.'

Mollie gets up slowly. The process of lunch has been a mere farce with her : a biscuit and a glass of sherry have constituted this regal feast. Still more leisurely does she leave the room, and with lagging steps proceeds to her room, where she finds Clifford waiting to help her to dress.

'What ever is the matter, my lady?' asks Clifford, horrified at the expression of mute agony on Mollie's face.

'Oh, Clifford!' answers Mollie, 'I am so miserable! I don't want to go to Hurlingham this afternoon, although I promised I would. Sir Fitzroy says I must go; and I have the most awful feeling upon me that something terrible is going to happen to me or to some one I know!'

'You are nervous, my lady,' says

Clifford ; 'it is all fancy. You are over-tired and worried with all your bothers, and no wonder,' adds Clifford, in an undertone ; 'you will be all right when you have been in the fresh air and seen your brother. You mope too much at home, my lady—forgive me saying so, but it is true ; you ought to go out more, and have cheerful society, not be always alone, and for ever wearying yourself out over money troubles. Take my advice, my lady, and go out more ; it is only your own money that you spend then, surely you have a right to that ?'

'Not while things remain as they are, Clifford,' replies Mollie ; 'some day perhaps I may be able to do as I like with my own, and also with what I earn, but at present it is impossible, as you really know well.'

'Well, I do, my lady,' answers Clifford ; 'and I only hope and pray that some day



things will be better and brighter for you, for you richly deserve some good luck.'

'Thank you, Clifford,' says Mollie, smiling a little wet smile that is first cousin to tears; 'it is always pleasant to be appreciated;' and she puts on a more cheerful expression, and devoutly thinks that Clifford is deceived by it into thinking that all is right once more, which Clifford is not in the least degree.

How could she be ? for Mollie's attempt at gaiety does not even deceive herself, and Clifford knows every look and turn of her expressive face too well to be taken in for a moment by any such acting.

'At any rate,' says Mollie, 'one thing I am determined. You may laugh at me, Clifford, and call me foolish, I give you free leave to do both; but since fate seems to ordain that I should go to Hurlingham, I

positively refuse to go without taking two things with me.'

'What are they, my lady?' asks Clifford, with pardonable curiosity.

'That blue smelling-bottle,' says Mollie, 'which is full of the strongest salts, and that flask of brandy,' pointing to the two things as she speaks.

Clifford looks at her in amazement; but perceiving that Mollie's face wears its most determined expression, she hands her the bottle and the flask, which Mollie proceeds to place carefully in the pocket of her dress. This done, she looks more relieved.

'Well, my lady,' mildly observes Clifford, 'in all the years I have lived with you I have never known you so nervous, and never knew you carry about such things as those!' pointing to Mollie's offending pocket with a most solemn air.

'I only hope,' answers Mollie, 'that you

will never know me do such a thing again, Clifford ; it is certainly very foreign to my usual habits, but the feeling is stronger than I am—I simply must take them. God knows,' she continues, 'I hope I shall return and tell you that all my nerves are nonsense, that I have still whole bones, and that everyone else is in possession of the same ; then I will never again believe in presentiments. As it is, something seems to hang over me, and to envelop my whole future in a cloud so thick, so black, that it will never lift again ; I seem on the border of a new life.'

At this moment a knock comes to the door, and the servant announces that Mrs. Standish is waiting for her ladyship. With the ghost of a smile to Clifford, Mollie leaves the room, and goes downstairs. Sir Fitzroy, she finds, has de-

parted ; there is nothing for it but to join Vivienne.

‘ Good gracious, Mollie ! ’ exclaims Vivienne ; ‘ what have you been doing to yourself ? Late hours don’t suit you. ’

‘ You are as bad as Fitzroy and Clifford ! ’ answers Mollie, almost impatiently. ‘ If you felt as ill and nervous as I do, you would look as ugly ; it is nothing but nerves, nought to say to the ball. ’

Truly Mollie does look startling. Her face is as white as her dress, and her great eyes look full of unshed tears. Vivienne, however, sets to work to cheer her up, and succeeds so well, that, by the time they arrive at Hurlingham, the air has lent some faint roses to Mollie’s pearl-like cheeks — her liveliness is not altogether forced. Once more she looks a presentable Mollie.

‘ The top of the morning to you, sweet

sister mine ; and to you also, fair cousin,' says Geoffrey, who, with Lord Mark, comes up to them as soon as they arrive upon the ground. 'Good girls,' he continues patronizingly. 'I approve of you ; you are alarmingly punctual. Something must be going to happen !'

'Oh, don't say that, Geoff !' implores Mollie, clasping her hands nervously.

'Dear me !' says Geoffrey. 'Don't look so scared, my darling ; I only meant——'

'Never mind what you meant,' answers Mollie ; 'let us talk of something else.'

'What is the matter with Lady L'Estrange ?' whispers Lord Mark to Vivienne. 'How fearfully ill she looks !'

'Yes ; doesn't she ?' responds Vivienne. 'She says she is ill, and has a feeling something is going to happen.'

'Who to ?' inquires Lord Mark

anxiously. 'If Mollie feels so ill, may she not be in for a bad illness? Perhaps she is going to die!' and at this appalling thought, Lord Mark almost groans, but just stops himself in time to avoid notice by the others.

In that lightning flash of thought, he has realized to the full what existence would seem to him without Mollie; for although she is nothing in the world to him, yet she is the one woman this fair world holds for him—no one could ever replace her. That is Lord Mark's pure feeling for her.

'When are you going to begin, Geoff?' asks Mollie.

'Almost directly,' he answers.

'Are you going to ride Enchantress first?' asks Vivienne.

'No,' replies Geoffrey; 'I shall keep her until the last. I am going to ride

Merlin first. I suppose I ought to go and put on my war-paint !'

Lord Mark is talking quietly to Mollie, trying to rouse her interest ; and, as usual when with him, she already looks much brighter and more cheerful.

Geoffrey comes round to Vivienne's side of the carriage.

'Well, my queen,' he says fondly, 'how are you after your exertions last night ? But I need hardly ask, for you look most lovely ;' and his brown eyes rest upon her loved face with a most tender expression in them.

'I enjoyed myself immensely, Geoff,' answers Vivienne ; 'and I feel extremely well, thank you, dear. The evening was a delightful one ; I hope we shall have many more this year. You must get leave from Aldershot as often as you can, Geoff ; will you ?' she asks.

‘Anything for you, my darling,’ answers Geoffrey. ‘Your wishes are the only commands I love to obey—even as I do you, my cousin.’

Vivienne blushes softly. It is pleasant to know of Geoffrey’s affection; she knows how simple and high-principled a one it is.

‘Well, time’s up,’ says Geoffrey; ‘I must be off, or I shall keep them waiting. Ladies,’ he continues, with a low bow to the two, ‘I am, for the first time, going to sport the colours you chose for me—the Kentish ones, “scarlet and Kentish-grey.” I will come and fetch you for some tea after the first two games are over;’ and with a gay wave of his hand, Geoffrey disappears.

In a few moments he emerges from the room where he has been donning his attire, and springs on to Merlin’s back.

The game begins, and progresses.



Away flies the ball, and away they all scud after it. They present an animated mass of colour, of men and ponies, and bright caps and jackets, all tearing along as if their very lives depended upon it. Fast and furious was the game; the players shouted and yelled, and the whacks on the balls sounded through the air. So near did they come to the ropes in their excitement, that the spectators took flight; and some, to save themselves from accident, clambered on to the wheels and seats of the carriages.

Mollie and Vivienne were standing up so that they might see all the better.

‘There’s Geoff!’ exclaimed Mollie excitedly, all her fears flown in the excitement of watching the game. ‘How well he plays!’ she continues, watching the flying figures of Geoffrey and Merlin.

The game continues for some time;

Geoffrey's side wins, and then a halt is called to get a B.-and-S., and fresh ponies. After a hunt for his hat, which has fallen off in the struggle, but which he at last finds again, Geoffrey joins Mollie and Vivienne and Lord Mark, and all together they adjourn to the tent for tea. They are not there many minutes, as time is getting on. The ladies and Lord Mark return to the carriage. Geoffrey goes off in search of Enchantress. He returns very shortly, mounted on Enchantress, and rides up to the side of the carriage.

‘I shan't be long, Mollie and Vivienne,’ he says; ‘we are only going to play for another twenty minutes. Shake hands, both of you, and wish me luck.’

Mollie and Vivienne comply with his request, and then, raising his cap gaily to them, he prepares to depart once more.

‘Remember, Mollie,’ he shouts to his

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sister, 'and you too, Vivienne, that I dine with you at eight o'clock this evening.'

'All right,' shouts Mollie in return.

Once more they are off; the whole scene becomes, as before, a mass of struggling humanity. The game is almost over, very little more, and Geoffrey's side will again have won. Mollie is standing up earnestly gazing at the game; never for one instant do her eyes leave the flying figure which represents her beloved Geoffrey. Suddenly—oh, heavens! that it should be so—there is a rush and a scramble, and some one is prone upon the ground.

Mollie, Vivienne, and Lord Mark have all seen it.

'It is nothing, Lady L'Estrange,' says Lord Mark, in an agitated voice; 'he will soon be all right again.'

'Go and see who it is,' says Mollie

hoarsely. 'No ; stay,' she says ; ' I will go myself.' And before anyone can prevent her, she is out of the carriage, and, with flying feet, runs to the spot where the form still lays motionless.

Mechanically the little group makes way for her. Tender-hearted men have gathered round what lies so still ; loving hands have loosened shirt and jacket, and a doctor has been sent for.

' Somebody's darling ' lies there, sick unto death.

Mollie pushes her way through the throng, and sinks on her knees by the prostrate, senseless form, and sees that it is her all in this world—her brother, her Geoffrey !

Never to their dying day do the strong men there assembled forget the low moan of unutterable agony with which Mollie raises Geoffrey's head, until it lies like a dead weight on her loving arm, the bright

curls pillowed so near the heart which beats so devotedly for him, and with a shaking hand Mollie holds a smelling-bottle to his nose, and then tries to pour some brandy between his clenched lips. But it is all of no avail : the beautiful eyes remain closed ; nothing shows that life still lingers but that awful sonorous breathing that no one who has heard it can ever forget, and slowly, drop by drop, Geoffrey's life-blood ebbs away.

By this time Vivienne and Lord Mark have arrived, and, with a shuddering sob of despair, Vivienne falls down by Geoffrey in a dead faint, from which, mercifully, it is very long before she recovers.

' Good heavens ! Lady L'Estrange,' says Lord Mark ; ' don't look like that ! Perhaps he will recover. Won't you come away, while the doctor sees the extent of the injuries ?'

' No,' says Mollie ; ' I will never leave

Geoffrey again. Oh, my darling, my darling !' she breaks off ; ' how can I bear it ? What shall I do ? ' and she lifts her agonized eyes to Lord Mark's sorrowing face with an expression of mute agony that would awake sympathy in the heart of the most heartless.


What effect has it then upon poor Lord Mark, who sees Mollie in this grief, and the man he cares for most in the world to all appearance lying there dying ?

' You must get the lady away,' whispers one of the gentlemen. ' Who is she ?'

' His sister,' briefly responds Lord Mark.

' Heaven help her, then !' says the gentleman. ' That poor boy will never speak or move again.'

Still Mollie kneels, and still Geoffrey lies there. At last the doctor comes, and, after a brief examination, they fetch a stretcher,



and slowly and reverently carry Geoffrey to the house.

Mollie still keeps fast hold of the nerveless fingers which cannot respond to the fond pressure of her own. Lord Mark half leads, half carries her, for she seems like a person in a dream, without sense or hearing. At last the awful procession arrives at the house, and by gentle hands poor Geoffrey is laid on a bed. He cannot even be undressed; so there he lies, in the bright colours which a short half-hour ago he had worn so bravely.

‘Is there any chance, doctor?’ asks Lord Mark.

‘Not the slightest,’ answers Dr. Brookes, with a tremble in his voice, for he cannot bear to give this verdict, which will, he sees plainly, this time be more than usually productive of sorrow and terrible grief.

‘God help his sister, then!’ replies Lord

Mark in a choking voice. 'She adored him ; who is to tell her ?'

'She wants no telling,' answers Dr. Brookes ; 'Lady L'Estrange knows it already. She is best with him. We will leave her. I shall remain here.'

'So shall I,' answers Lord Mark. 'I have telegraphed, as you wished, for Sir Villiers,' he goes on ; 'and also to Mr. Standish and Sir Fitzroy L'Estrange.'

All had been done that could be done. Mollie was still kneeling by the side of Geoffrey's bed, her head buried in the clothes, and his hand clasped in hers, while she poured forth every endearing word that she could think of, and implored Geoffrey not to go away and leave her. She seemed to be altered entirely, everything and everybody forgotten in her all-powerful grief, in the face of the awful calamity which had befallen her.



‘How did it happen?’ asks the doctor.

‘His pony slipped up and fell; Geoffrey was underneath, and his neck struck a sharp piece of earth a little raised from the ground.’

‘And that,’ says Dr. Brookes, ‘has divided the main artery at the back of his neck.’

So it was; and although everything that human skill could devise was done, nothing could stop the inevitable; Geoffrey was bleeding to death.

It had happened at five, just twenty-four hours after he had waved his good-night to Mollie and Vivienne on the steps of Morton House, in the grey dawn of the early morning. Now it was seven o’clock. Sir Villiers could not get there for some hours, probably too late to see his only son alive.

Just then Norman arrived. His grief

was terrible to witness, for he had loved Geoffrey very sincerely.

Poor Vivienne had gone from one fainting-fit into another. Dr. Brookes had at last succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, and in despairing grief she tottered rather than walked into the room to say her last farewell to Geoffrey.

Supported by Norman, she gazed upon the marble whiteness of Geoffrey's face. All his beautiful sunny curls had been cut off, and, sad but mute testimony of what was, lay in a shining heap upon the coverlet.

Poor Vivienne took one up, and with shaking fingers placed it in her bosom, and then, kneeling by the bed, for the last time in this world she pressed her warm, tender lips lovingly, madly to Geoffrey's ; the kiss he had so often desired above all things in this life, which had but once been his, was given him freely in death. And then,

utterly overcome, Vivienne fell back into Norman's arms, once more happily unconscious; and when she next woke she was in her own room in London, for faint after faint succeeded each other in rapid succession.

Still Mollie knelt on and on. It seemed as if she was carved in stone, so quiet, so motionless did she appear, so unutterably wretched were the eyes which gazed always at Geoffrey's beloved face. Well has it been said that :

'Light sufferings give us leisure to complain,  
We groan, but cannot speak, in greater pain.'

Such was Mollie's suffering. At last she looked up and caught sight of Lord Mark standing at the end of the room, his arms on the chimney-piece, and on them his head bowed down, while heavy sobs shook his frame, and hot tears slowly coursed their way down his cheeks, that he was reckless of

anyone seeing as he watched the bright and joyous life of the friend whom, man and boy, he had loved so well, ebbing away, and he was powerless to avert this awful doom. And then Mollie came up to him and put her hand gently upon his arm.

‘One pain is lessened by another’s anguish;’ and as Mollie looked at him, she knew that Lord Mark also suffered, and she tried to comfort him, but the words seemed to choke her.

‘You loved him, Lord Mark,’ she whispered brokenly. ‘God bless you for it; you are a true friend!’

Lord Mark looks at Mollie out of his aching eyes, and feels that he would give worlds to have the right, if only for a short hour, of comforting Mollie in her agony; for if her misery is great now, what will it be when Geoffrey is gone? But he puts the thought sternly away from him, and

returns to the bedside, where Mollie has again taken up her watch.

‘ If he would only speak, only say “ Good-bye, Mollie darling !” ’ she whispers to Lord Mark, with an indescribably piteous look in her great eyes, which are bright and shining, for no tears can Mollie shed ; ‘ that would be everything ; I think I could bear it better. Do you think, Mark, he will ever speak again ?’


‘ God knows. Oh, my poor darling !’ exclaims Lord Mark, ‘ would that I could comfort you. What can I say, what can I do, to show you my sympathy ?’

‘ Nothing,’ answers Mollie, with a dreary smile ; ‘ nothing,’ she repeats slowly ; ‘ no one can help me ever again if Geoff dies. Can nothing be done, Mark ?’ again asks Mollie. ‘ Oh,’ she breaks off, ‘ this is awful ; my presentiment was a true one, and it is taking away from me all that is dear to me

in this world—the one human being who cared for and understood me. Don't stand there looking at me,' she goes on excitedly; 'go and get more doctors; send to London for Mr. Hewett, for Sir James Paget, for everyone; my Geoff shall not die! Surely God will not ask this of me. O God! I shall go mad; I cannot live without Geoff,' she goes on.

Mollie is almost frantic with her grief; for the moment she seems to have lost all self-control, and she presses Geoffrey's cold fingers to her lips, and covers them with burning kisses, while her face is almost ghastly, and her big eyes gleam with an unnatural light. And still the beautiful form lies motionless upon the bed.

'Would to God I could help you, my poor darling,' says Lord Mark brokenly, 'for it is simple torture to me to see you suffer so awfully, and, except by keenest



sympathy, not to be able to help you or Geoff; but, Mollie, you must be your own brave self; you must face what God has sent you, and you must bear it because it is His will.'

With such words as these does Lord Mark strive to comfort Mollie, and to help her bear what, alas! he sees too plainly is before her. And even as he speaks he sees that over Geoffrey's face is already beginning to spread that grey dawn which is the herald of eternal day.

It is half-past eight, and still Mollie kneels on; she is in reality cold as marble, but the fever raging in her veins seems to burn and consume her as if she was devoured by fire. Her head is throbbing, her pulse is leaping and jumping; every nerve in her body is in a quiver of intense agony; her nerves are strained to their utmost tension in this hand-to-hand, inch-by-inch,

minute-by-minute fight with Death, the conqueror of all pitiful humanity, for the one life in all this fair world for her—the brother whose existence makes up the sum total of her existence, the one bright spot in her lonely, uncared-for life.

With a choking feeling in her throat, which seems as if it had suddenly contracted, Mollie forces back the tears which had nearly burst from her aching eyes ; but not yet can Mollie cry. While Geoffrey is still alive there is no time for such weakness, though the tears would have perhaps eased the band of iron which seems to encircle her burning brow, and would have washed away more perhaps of this awful weight round her poor heart ; but no ! this is a time for action, not crying ; there is a whole lifetime, perhaps, still before her, in which she will have nothing left to do but weep all day and all night for him whom



her soul loved so far, so far above all other earthly things, friends, or riches.

The hands of the clock seem to mark the minutes quicker than they have ever done before. Ah! surely other days they do not fly like that, taking with them into the vastness of eternity broken hopes and loves and fears?

Mollie still gazes fixedly at Geoffrey's adored face. Dr. Brookes has walked silently into the room; his finger is on Geoffrey's pulse, and a look of heartfelt sorrow creeps into his kindly eyes.

Not a movement has Geoffrey made from the moment of his fall; where they laid him, so he remains. The shadow is spreading fast and faster; the breath comes fainter and fainter.

'He is dying,' whispers Dr. Brookes.

Lord Mark kneels by Mollie, and puts his arm round her, all unheeded by her.

‘What did Dr. Brookes say?’ asks Mollie hoarsely.

‘That our darling is dying!’ whispers poor Lord Mark. Then, seeing how near the end is, he whispers: ‘Kiss him, Mollie darling!’

Mollie raises herself and throws her arms round Geoffrey’s neck; and with one finger on Geoffrey’s pulse, presses her lips to his. As she does so, the beautiful eyes uncloseth for one brief moment, a light of no earthly kindling spreads over his beautiful face, and with a soft sigh Geoffrey Adair gives his pure soul ‘unto his Captain Christ, under whose colours he had fought so long.’

Lord Mark caught Mollie as she fell back into his outstretched arms; as he held her so he burst into tears—the most heart-breaking he had ever shed; and as he gazed on Mollie’s unconscious form, he would have given all he possessed to

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have saved her from this awful sorrow. Geoffrey's sweet pure life was ended in time and begun in eternity, and from the quiet room came—

‘Only a sound of weeping  
From watchers around a bed,  
But Rest to the weary spirit,  
Peace to the quiet Dead !’



## CHAPTER XIII.

‘ TO WHERE BEYOND THESE VOICES THERE IS  
PEACE.’

‘ God keeps a niche  
In heaven to hold our idols, and albeit  
He brake them to our faces, and denied  
That our close kisses should impair their white,  
I know we shall behold them, raised, complete,  
New Memnons singing in the great God-light.’

E. B. BROWNING.

A VERY long time elapsed after Mollie became unconscious before she struggled back to life. What an awful awakening it was! Who that has seen sudden death does not know what that feeling of complete bewilderment is when, after such a sight and unconsciousness, the life first

returns to our frozen veins, and once more our heart beats, and we begin to realize that we are alive and suffering, and that our loved one is gone for ever in this world from our longing arms, our aching eyes? God help all those to whom such a fate is sent, for only He can comfort them !

When Mollie at last opened her eyes she found herself in another room, with Dr. Brookes' kind face gazing at her with the keenest sympathy. Mollie sat up and pushed back the hair from her hot brow ; her eyes were bright, a deep flush was on her face.

'What has happened?' she inquired, with a piteous look from Dr. Brookes to Lord Mark, who was standing by with the traces of tears still in his eyes. 'Oh, I remember !' said Mollie, for neither of them could answer. 'Oh, Geoff, my darling, it can't be true ; you have not left me for

ever !' Then, seeing that Dr. Brookes was wiping his eyes, and that Lord Mark could not speak, Mollie exclaimed : ' How shall I bear it ? It is harder than I can bear, Dr. Brookes !' she continued. ' Are you sure he is dead ? Can you do nothing for him ? He would not have died without saying " Good-bye, Mollie darling," you know he would not ; and he didn't speak, and he looked so white and odd. I must go to him,' Mollie went on ; ' he loved me so much—his cry was always for Mollie. We understood each other so well : perhaps he wants me all this time !'

And Mollie got up, and with tottering steps tried to reach the door.

' This is awful !' said poor Lord Mark. ' Oh dear, Dr. Brookes ! what is to be done ?'

Dr. Brookes was too quick for Mollie ; he laid his hand gently upon her arm.

'My dear lady,' he said, 'you cannot do anything more for your dear brother—it has pleased God to take him home. He died quite peacefully and without pain : you must try and control yourself, for the sake of others, and because he would have wished it.'

At last—the allusion to Geoffrey's wishes had roused her—it seemed as if Mollie now clearly understood what it was that had happened to her ; and with the knowledge, her usual unselfishness asserted itself.

'I didn't understand,' she said piteously, 'I will do as you say, Dr. Brookes ; but I may see Geoff again, may I not ?'

'You shall see him presently,' said Dr. Brookes.

Then Mollie turned to Lord Mark, and with trembling lips thanked him for all he had done.

At that instant a servant called Lord Mark away. In a few moments he returned, and said :

‘ I have just had a telegram to say that your father has arrived ; he is at your house, too overcome to come here. Norman is with him, but your husband has not returned yet. You will come back with me, Lady L’Estrange, will you not ? your father wants you.’

‘ Yes, I will come,’ answered Mollie gently ; ‘ but I must see Geoff first.’

‘ Very well,’ said Dr. Brookes, ‘ you shall do so.’

Lord Mark went to order the carriage ; and then Mollie walked alone into the room where Geoffrey lay wrapped in that calm slumber whose awakening was eternity.

Mollie asked them to let her go in to the room alone ; she felt as if she must be by herself when she again gazed upon the one



person who had been her world, her all.

Dr. Brookes opened the door of the room where, with the blinds drawn down, lay all that was mortal of him who, only a few short hours before, had been so full of life and love, health and strength.

Mollie passed silently into the room, and, with swift steps, approached the bed ; then, with an exceeding bitter cry, she cast herself down beside the brother whose last words had been addressed to her.

Gentle hands had done all that could be done, and fragrant blossoms, even in that short time, had been disposed about the still form. There, in that silent majesty, which awes even the most careless and unthinking, lay Geoffrey Adair, the light of immortality shining on his beautiful dead face. The glorious eyes, whose long silky lashes swept his cheeks, were softly closed ;

the masses of hair still clustered about the broad brow, as it had only been cut off at the back; the sweet mouth rested in a smile that seemed to speak of the angels. Human eyes could only acknowledge that Geoffrey must be safe for time and eternity, 'until the day dawns, and the shadows flee away.' He was now for ever at rest.

Ah, Mollie darling! take your leave of him who was to you what no other creature will ever be. Your love for each other was sacred — something apart; your thoughts and wishes were alike. One joy was yours—one sorrow yours; in heart and soul you were united. Oh, Mollie, well may you weep! 'God gave, and He has taken away;' and though your life may be a long one, you can never again be what you were before Geoffrey was asked from you as a willing sacrifice. Kiss him,

Mollie ; no such kisses can e'er be yours again ! And in your agony and sorrow, thank God that He has let you know what the love of a devoted brother can be—to which you can look back all your life with no feeling of regret—which has been your crown of happiness in this life, and whose death will lead you to a crown of eternal glory.

But not a tear fell from Mollie's eyes. She gazed and gazed as if her soul were in her eyes ; and as if by the fierceness of her longing, she could call Geoffrey back to life.

At last Lord Mark and Dr. Brookes came into the room, thinking that she ought to come home.

'I am ready,' said Mollie ; and, as she spoke, she pressed her white lips to her dead darling's, and, with a face of unspeakable agony, took Lord Mark's arm,

and passed from the room to where the carriage was waiting.

Silently Mollie got in, and they were some distance on their homeward journey before she spoke. A strong shiver from time to time shook her slight figure ; and, by the movement of the fingers (which Lord Mark, with that unspoken sympathy that is so much better than words, had taken in his), alone did Lord Mark understand the tempest of grief that swept over Mollie's aching heart.

It was a glorious night—a dark blue sky, with myriads of diamond stars, and a globe of brightest silver, in the guise of the moon, sailing swiftly along. Never, in all the days to come, did either of them ever forget that drive, or the awful scenes they had been through.

‘I am glad you were with me, Lord Mark,’ said Mollie at last ; ‘I think I

should have gone mad if I had been alone.'

'I am indeed thankful I was with you, Lady L'Estrange,' answered Lord Mark. 'I loved Geoff as if he had been my own brother; and I think I knew better than anyone else what you were to each other.'

A smothered sob broke from Mollie every moment: it seemed louder and harder.

'I wonder where Fitzroy was?' she said.

'Out,' briefly responded Lord Mark. He guessed accurately where Sir Fitzroy was. 'No doubt,' he resumed, 'we shall find him at home.'

'We are nearly there,' answered Mollie. 'Oh, Lord Mark!' she continued; 'my poor father! I dread seeing him. It will be the death of him, for he was devoted

to Geoff. 'Who,' she went on, 'will tell him that Geoff is dead? I cannot—I cannot. I had to tell him that my mother was dead; and I cannot tell him that Geoff is killed.'

'He knows it already,' answered Lord Mark. 'I telegraphed to Norman to break it to him, if your husband was not there; for I knew you could not.'

'How good you are!' says Mollie, raising grateful eyes to his; 'you are so kind and thoughtful. Oh, Lord Mark! Geoff told me to keep you for my friend. He said you would be a true one to me; and so you have proved yourself. Will you go on being my real friend—I need it doubly now? You must be Geoff and Mark both to me; will you?'

'I will,' says Lord Mark, in a voice broke by emotion. 'God helping me, you shall never want a friend that you can

depend upon while I am alive.' And Mollie never did.

Thus they arrive at Kensington. When the door opens, Mollie sees the figure of her father coming towards her with the tears streaming down his cheeks, his white head bowed down in the abandonment of grief. He holds out his arms, and in a minute Mollie is clasped to Sir Villiers' heart. In a few minutes they go into the drawing-room where Sir Fitzroy and Norman are; and, in a few short words, Mollie tells all that has passed.

Sir Fitzroy had been with Circe; and when he came home to dress for dinner, preparatory to returning to Circe, he found Lord Mark's telegram. He was inexpressibly shocked, and was on the point of starting for Hurlingham, when Norman arrived, and told him that he had received a message from Lord Mark to say that

poor Geoffrey had passed away, and that Mollie was coming back at once. To do Sir Fitzroy justice, he was so horrified that his manner quite altered. Once more he was the lover who had won Mollie's first love—once more he was the man who had seemed devoted to Mollie, and who had cared for Geoffrey as his brother officer and friend ; and, for the time being, Circe was utterly forgotten.

Sir Fitzroy could be very tender if he liked, and now, in this time of sore trouble, all that was good in him asserted itself, and he allowed the good that really was still in him to have fair play. So it happened that when Mollie came into the room he went towards her with outstretched arms, and Mollie nestled into her husband's arms, the first time for many a long day.

‘ My poor darling,’ whispered Sir Fitzroy tenderly, and he kissed Mollie gently.



'Oh, Fitzroy!' said Mollie, 'it was so awful.'

'Don't say any more now, my darling,' answered Sir Fitzroy, 'but come upstairs and go to bed; you must try and rest.'

'Who will take care of the Patriarch?' whispered Mollie.

'I will,' said Lord Mark; 'if you will only go to bed, Lady L'Estrange, and try and go to sleep, I will see to Sir Villiers.'

'Thank you,' said Mollie, with a grateful smile. 'Good-night, Lord Mark, and God bless you for all you have done for me to-day.' And with a fond embrace from Sir Villiers, Mollie leaves the room, Sir Fitzroy half carrying her.

Lord Mark watches them with a sigh, and then turns to his task of trying to comfort Sir Villiers.

'Mark, you must be dead beat,' says

Norman kindly ; ‘ come and have something to eat.’

And in truth Lord Mark looks worn out. Together they pass into the dining-room. The table is laid for four ; the servants have forgotten to alter it in the confusion. There is the vacant place :

‘ But one is missing, and no future presence,  
However dear, can fill that vacant space ;  
For ever shall the burning thought remain,  
“ Never, beloved, again ! never again ! ”’

It is a sight to fill the hardest heart with sorrow, it all seems such a mockery : the bright lights, the flowers and china, the snowy linen, the sparkling silver—everything speaks of joy and life, but the one who lent happiness to everything is gone away on that long journey from which no traveller returns.

Slowly Mollie goes upstairs, and as she totters into her room she sees her faithful

Clifford sobbing as if her heart would break. What would not Mollie give for such a relief as that ? but as yet it is denied her.

'Ah, milady,' sobs Clifford, 'this is awful ; what can I do to comfort you ?'

'Nothing,' replies Mollie, with a ghastly smile, 'except give me your sympathy.'

'I do, milady,' answers Clifford ; she was devoted to Geoffrey, as indeed was everybody. But being a sensible and an unselfish woman, she puts by her own grief in the face of the one which is so immeasurably greater. 'I think, sir, if you would get something for her ladyship to eat and drink,' says Clifford, 'that perhaps then she might get some sleep.'

Sir Fitzroy departs, and returns with some soup and champagne, which Mollie swallows to please them. And then Clifford undresses her with tender hands, and, watched by her husband and Clifford, at

last Mollie falls asleep from pure exhaustion. Very sad and very lovely she looks, and her likeness to Geoffrey is more marked than ever as she lies there so still and so tired.

The next day poor Geoffrey's body is brought to Kensington. Vivienne comes there, and remains with Mollie. Her grief is so deep that she seems like an old woman. Never, till Geoffrey's terrible death, had she in any way realized what he had been to her, how real a hold he had upon her affections ; and now he is gone, and nothing she can say or do can show him how much she loved him.

Then, for the first time, she thinks of the kiss she had given him the night of the ball at Stepmead Abbey, and she is glad with a great joy that once in his life she granted him the favour she had so often laughingly denied him. Together she and

Mollie go and gaze their last at Geoffrey before he is for ever hidden from their sight :

‘ Yes ; and just now I have seen him,  
Cold, smiling, and blest,  
Laid in his coffin—God help me !  
While he is at rest,  
I am cursed still to live.’

These were the thoughts that passed through their minds as they stood there. A few days more, and in the full brightness of the summer day, in the pretty old churchyard at Earlston, tenderly and reverently borne on the shoulders of labourers who had known and loved him from his babyhood, they lay Geoffrey Adair in his last resting-place. The simple, upright life is ended, but his example will remain for ever : never will he be forgotten by those who loved him so truly.

Sir Villiers is almost beside himself ; he stands leaning on Mollie’s arm, dependent

upon her in his hour of need. Vivienne is heartbroken, so are Norman, Lord Mark, and even Sir Fitzroy. Sir Fitzroy is standing by Mollie, and Lord Mark next to her.

Mollie seems gifted with a supernatural strength ; she has for the last few days done everything for everybody ; consoled her father, comforted Vivienne—in a word, has been the mainstay of all. Her face is as white as a sheet as she stands by the grave in her deep crape ; her eyes are raised to heaven with an imploring look in their tortured depths ; into her mind come the lines :

‘But who with mine his spirit blends,  
As mine was blended with my brother ?  
Our souls were knit ; and thou and I,  
My brother, grew in love together.  
The chain is broke that bound us there :  
When shall I find its like again ?’

And as the last words of the beautiful ser-

vice are spoken, with, at last, a sob the tears come, which save her reason, as Mollie bids her last farewell to her darling Geoffrey, and faints away in Fitzroy's arms.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### HEART AND SOUL LONELINESS.

‘ Oh ! would that you were with me,  
But nevermore, my king !  
Save in the happy land of dreams,  
Shall I see your face again ?’

ESSEX STUART : *A Farewell.*

A VERY sad, miserable time followed Geoffrey's death. It was impossible that it could be otherwise ; but contrary to all expectation, Mollie did not have the illness which, as a result of her fainting-fit at Geoffrey's funeral, seemed imminent.

No matter who lives, who dies, the world goes on just the same. If we are breaking our hearts, people must, and do, still eat



and drink. It is a world of change ; few people hold the same opinion, stick to the same liking, for more than five minutes ; and Heaven help the men, for no chameleon, changing its hues as you look at it with the rapidity of a flash of lightning, can come up to their extraordinary and unequalled powers of shifting their so-called love from one unlucky woman to another.

Those women who have had hard work for their sole lovers are say, I, the best off ; for they have that which, given health, brains, and fingers (most useful and general commodities), is better worth having than the unsteady, vacillating, doubtful possession honoured by the name of 'man's love'—never did a word so belie its meaning. When it is to be found (and how rare that is !) we grant that it is good ; but it is like truth (when did love ever mean truth?), it is deep buried in a well, and the

bucket is not made, or the chain either, that will pull such an inestimably valuable cargo into the unblushing light of day.

For many a weary day did Mollie suffer from extreme prostration and a complete inability to do anything but sit for hours with her hands folded on her lap, her eyes replete with unshed tears, and full of remembrance of the sad past, that recollection that nothing on this side of the grave would ever alter.

Mollie had grown very thin, very pale ; but her beauty had, if possible, increased. The summit and perfection of a woman's beauty is when suffering has touched it with its clasp of iron ; then, as gold is tried by fire, so does beauty reach and touch its grandest point of loveliness. Such was the case with Mollie, and those who saw her were impressed with the change. Her face was like the pictures of angels, so exalted,

so purified was its expression. The school of suffering is often a blessed one, always that if we accept it in a right spirit ; but sometimes—— Well, we are human ; that will crop up, and then we find it, until that feeling is allayed, very hard to say, ‘ All is well.’

Soon after Geoffrey’s death Vivienne and Norman went abroad. Her health had suffered so much that such a change was absolutely necessary. Mollie often hears from her, but it will be many a long day before they return to England—if ever, as they can live just where they please.

A year passes quickly away. It is close upon the anniversary of Geoffrey’s death. Then one day there comes to Mollie a fresh sorrow. Good, kind, excellent Sir Villiers is found dead in his chair, a smile on his face, in his hand the photograph of his much-loved Geoffrey.

This completely overwhelms Mollie, and for a long time she is inconsolable. Were it not for Clifford and Robin, and visits from Lord Mark, she could not bear her life, for Geoffrey and Sir Villiers are dead, her two darlings; Vivienne is far away, so are her sisters; poverty is rapidly increasing, and, worst of all, Sir Fitzroy soon tired of his fit of goodness, and just when Mollie needs his sympathy and love the most, and has been expecting and hoping for a return of both, he returns to his allegiance to Circe Dysart. Once more 'the Siren' has the only victim she has ever cared to retain safe within the meshes of the net she knows so well how to land.

A sad fate truly is Mollie's; but she lives on undauntedly; she will not give in; and through it all Clifford and Lord Mark help her, and try to make her forget what is,

and entice her to live chiefly in recollections of her most happy past.

‘Clifford,’ says Mollie one day, ‘what should I do without you ? I think I should run away.’

‘Oh no, you would not, milady,’ answers Clifford, smiling.

‘Yes, but I should,’ answers Mollie with decision. ‘You won’t leave me ever, will you, Clifford ?’

‘Not as long as you will keep me, milady,’ answers Clifford heartily ; ‘I have no wish to change.’

‘You believe, now, in presentiments, don’t you, Clifford ?’ continues Mollie.

‘Well, milady,’ answers Clifford, ‘I am bound to confess that you have reason to do so.’

‘And more is coming,’ says Mollie ; ‘but I don’t mind now ; I think I can bear anything, for now Geoffrey is dead, nothing can

ever hurt me again.' And Mollie bursts into heartrending tears.

Clifford soothes her gently, and Mollie takes heart again while Clifford repeats—

'All unknown the future lies,  
Let it rest;  
God who veils it from our eyes,  
He knows best.  
Ask not what shall be to-morrow,  
But content;  
Take the cup of joy or sorrow  
God has sent.'

END OF VOL. II.









the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1995 (Department of Health 1996).

There is a growing emphasis on the need to improve the efficiency of the public sector, and to ensure that the public sector is able to deliver the services that are required by the public. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the introduction of competition, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices.

One of the key initiatives in the public sector is the introduction of competition. This has led to a number of changes, including the introduction of private companies to provide public services, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices.

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